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Publication Date

2018

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

*The Biography of Othello,
a Signifying Life*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Susan Solt

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

*The Biography of Othello,
a Signifying Life*

by

Susan Solt

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Brenda Stevenson, Chair

In 1604, during an age when poetry wielded power in the public sphere as political critique and social commentary, Shakespeare introduced onto the London stage his “noble Moor” as the hero of a tragedy. A heretofore demonized and lampooned creature of English Renaissance drama – “the blackamoor” – was suddenly rendered as a sympathetic and suffering, sentient human being: an honorable man cruelly victimized for nothing more than racist spite. That moment of empathy when the Englishman could weep openly for a black African as if for he himself was the birth of a modern Western consciousness of a shared human condition that could transcend race. It was a moment of unprecedented commensurability when the Western gaze saw itself reflected in the other – and his name was Othello.

In *The Biography of Othello*, Susan Solt demonstrates that in a gesture of extraordinary affinity during a rare window of cultural tolerance, Shakespeare used his play about an interracial marriage to make a case for racial understanding. From that moment forward, Othello, the African prince captured into slavery who rose as a free man to command the military forces of sixteenth-century Venice, would forever be enshrined as the signifying counterpoint to the prevailing Western construct of the brute African slave.

Providing the reader with a massively researched study of Othello's life imagined in its historical context, Solt achieves nothing less than a re-write of the master narrative that reframes the underreported African presence in world history – especially in Shakespeare's London. She critically examines what occurred when black people and white people first interacted in the intersection of cultures in the early modern world, and uncovers overlooked antecedents to America's historical struggle with race and racism and the stain of slavery on our national character. In Susan Solt's reading of the play, the figure of Othello is a vector for the transformative role the construction of race plays in the forces of history, which explains why a work of literature written so long ago still speaks to us today.

Although crafted on a matrix of scholarship, *The Biography of Othello* is not a typical history book, it is not just another book about Shakespeare – it is about us; it is about our shared cultural identity across the spectrum of human difference. Watching or reading *Othello* today is to live 400 years of race in Western civilization. Through transforming Othello's fictional story into a historically-based cultural biography, Susan Solt gives face, voice, and agency to the racial other. The intimate other. The man inside Shakespeare's storied construct. For it is through the intimacy of this encounter with Othello that we can also seek to know ourselves – our own otherness – and our own privilege.

The dissertation of Susan Solt is approved.

Robin Davis Gibran Kelley

Muriel C. McClendon

Arthur L. Little

Brenda Stevenson, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

IN MEMORY OF MY PARENTS

Mary Ellen Solt

and

Leo F. Solt

the poet and the historian

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation project is the culmination of a full and rich life in the arts, in scholarship, and in education. My pathway to and through this work has been both unorthodox and uniquely rewarding. It was a personal quest that I undertook in order to enrich and dimension my professional life and to be in a position to share with the field, students, and colleagues, what I have learned along the way – surprising discoveries about Shakespeare and *Othello*.

While teaching full-time at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, California, I literally transformed my life and went back to school in the late oughts to pursue additional graduate studies. I did this in order to get what I viewed as the requisite education to be a better teacher through developing my cultural competency and to write with authority on *Othello* and race. After taking a few classes, I was truly fortunate first to be admitted into the Interdisciplinary M.A. Program in African American Studies at UCLA and then into the PH.D. program in the UCLA Department of History as an Americanist with an interest in early modern Atlantic history. I could not have arrived at this culminating moment of completing this dissertation without the belief and guidance of my adviser, Professor Brenda Stevenson, who is not only a brilliant scholar and mentor, but also a great believer in the value of the research I have undertaken and the work produced in these pages. I am also grateful to Distinguished Professor Robin Davis Gibran Kelley for his support, unique insights, and enthusiastic encouragement. I thank the rest of my dissertation committee Associate Professor Muriel C. McClendon and Associate Professor Arthur L. Little for their patience and guidance.

I also wish to thank other members of the UCLA History faculty who have been instrumental in steering me through this academic journey: Research Professor Edward Alpers, Professor Andrew Apter, Professor Eric Avila, Emerita Professor Ruth Bloch, Associate Professor Scot Brown, Emerita Professor Ellen DuBois, Distinguished Research Professor Christopher Ehret, Professor Kelley Little Hernandez, Professor Michael Meranze, Professor Anthony Pagden, Professor Joan Waugh, and Associate Professor Craig Yirush.

I am grateful for support from the UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Program Grant (2011); Institute of American Cultures/UCLA Bunche Center Research Grant in Ethnic Studies London (Summer 2008); UCLA Department of History Research Travel Stipend (Summer 2008); and numerous Faculty Development Grants, California Institute of the Arts (2003-2014).

I owe a very special debt to the many public historians who work as professional guides at a very high level throughout the globe. A number of these highly accomplished individuals shared my journey to find Othello in Shakespeare's early modern world. Three in particular became quite engaged in my research and they enormously enriched my on-site discoveries and experience. They are Jonathan Bill Doe of Ghana, Sara Grinzato of Venice, and Emine Filiz of Istanbul.

On a personal note, I wish to thank Tanya McKinnon, Dr. James H. Cones III, Dr. Lisbeth Gant-Britton, Tatiane S. Santa Rosa, Alison Trybom Lucas, Dr. Stephanie Moore, and Dr. Edward C (Ted) Warburton. I also give a warm shout-out to my English cousin Mary Le Couteur and her husband Jim for being willing to repeatedly host me as I would use London as my base of travel in the course of my research. And I thank my dear friend, author Christie Dickason, for support as a sounding board. I am also grateful to my dear friend and colleague

Fran Bennett. Fran had the patience as an acting coach to help me to understand Othello better through speaking his words. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my sister, Catherine Solt, who has been with me every step of the way.

Susan Solt

Santa Cruz, California, February 2018

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

It is February 2018, and Susan Solt is into her second year as dean of the Arts at UC Santa Cruz where she is also a distinguished professor of Theater Arts. Prior to her current position Susan was Senior V.P. of Production for Miramax Films before resigning to become Dean of the CalArts School of Theater in 1995. As CalArts dean of Theater, Susan instituted the Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts under the directorship of Janie Geiser, an internationally recognized visual/theater artist and experimental filmmaker. She also founded programs in Creative Producing and in Writing for Performance – an initiative that was first headed by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, the first African American woman to be so honored. Along with securing CalArts' Theater School as one of the top-ten professional training programs in the country (US News and World Report), Susan Solt's legacy as dean also rests on establishing the Center for New Theater (CNT), the professional producing arm of the School for which she served as Founding Producer/Artistic Director.

As a feature film producer, Susan's credits include the Warner Bros. box office hits *Presumed Innocent*, starring Harrison Ford, and *Doc Hollywood*, starring Michael J. Fox. Her film career began with Academy Award-winning filmmaker Alan J. Pakula's *Sophie's Choice*, starring Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline. For a brief moment Susan even served as on-set Polish dialect coach to Ms. Streep. Based in New York City for eight years, Susan worked exclusively as Pakula's producer. Later in Hollywood (after Warner Bros. and prior to joining Miramax) she was founding president of Dryads Entertainment, a Santa Monica-based production company with a distribution deal with 20th Century Fox.

As a theater producer, Susan Solt produced the world premieres of Richard Foreman and Sophie Havilland's *Bad Behavior* and French author Valere Novarina's *Theater of the*

Ears. This last production was presented at the 2000 Henson International Festival of Puppet Art in New York and at Festival d'Avignon 2001. In 2002, Susan produced the CalArts Center for New Theater's all-female, multicultural, site-specific production of *King Lear*, directed by Travis Preston. The celebrated African American actress Fran Bennett played the title role. *King Lear* premiered at the Brewery in downtown Los Angeles in 2002 and was invited to France to anchor the 2003 Frictions Festival in Dijon. Susan received an NAACP Image Award as Producer of *King Lear*. Following *Lear*, she commissioned an adaptation of *Peach Blossom Fan*, directed by the internationally renowned Chinese artist Chen Shi-Zheng, which premiered at REDCAT during its inaugural season in 2004.

Susan Solt's training and background are in the Theater. She studied acting in London and directing and dramaturgy in Poland on a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship. In Poland, she participated in workshops with Jerzy Grotowski, Ryszard Cieslak and other members of the legendary Laboratory Theater in Wroclaw. Additionally, Susan is the recipient of an NEA Fellowship, an IREX Fellowship, and an Asian Cultural Council Fellowship. She matriculated at Smith College, received a Bachelor of Arts from Indiana University, Bloomington, and holds an MFA in Theatre Administration from the Yale School of Drama.

Susan Solt resigned her CalArts' Theater School deanship and leadership of the CalArts Center for New Theater in 2003 after a highly productive near decade-long term. She then returned to the faculty to teach arts entrepreneurship and film producing in the School she had led. She also went back to school. Since then, Susan has earned an M.A. in African-American Studies and an M.A. and C.Phil in US History from UCLA. She hopes to complete her doctorate by June 2018. Her dissertation is titled: *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life*.



PROLOGUE: PART 1

Othello, the noblest man of man's making.

– Swinburne (1901)¹

Probably the only black person in the western popular imagination to exist before the seventeenth century is fictional. Shakespeare's Othello is a timeless character, often transplanted out of the sixteenth-century context, but the text gives us important clues to how Europeans saw Africans in this period...

– Catherine Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence* (2016)²

“Noble Othello,” The Moor of Venice³

Through the deliquescing mists of a morning just dawning nearly five-hundred years ago, a powerfully built figure of man, a black man, strides purposefully as he crosses Venice’s storied St. Mark’s square (fig. 1). His destination, the Palace of the Doge. Immaculately attired in the regalia of his high military office he is neither young nor old, but in the prime of life. Known colloquially as the Moor of Venice (moor, short for blackamoor or black African in early modern English), the man’s name is Othello. He is General Othello, supreme commander of the Venetian armed forces. And straggling after him as he makes his way across the grand piazza is a phalanx of soldiers and angry citizens.

What does this, a narrative account of an early scene in William Shakespeare’s (fig. 2) Renaissance tragedy, *Othello*, portend?

General Othello has been summoned urgently to appear before the Duke of this powerful and wealthy city-state, while the citizenry still sleeps. If Othello is anxious, he does not show it. That is not his nature. Yet, despite his confident step, the General must anticipate his upcoming interview with his sovereign with some understandable apprehension. Surely, he will be called to account. For Othello is well aware that he has trespassed on the time-honored rights of another man’s authority – the prerogative of sixteenth century European patriarchal privilege that confers onto the father the right to give his daughter’s hand in marriage to a man of his choosing. To make matters worse in the custom of courtesy, the man Othello has offended is a nobleman and a senator of Venice, an honored member of the ruling Signiory. For, yes, it is true: General Othello has eloped with Senator Brabantio’s daughter,

Desdemona. And the bed that Othello has just been roused from to appear before the Duke is the nuptial bed he is sharing for the first time with his new bride.⁴

In a plot known only to the lovers and a few reliable confidants, hours earlier Desdemona has stolen from the cloistered comforts of her father's palazzo to be ferried by a ready gondolier to the spot of her fated rendezvous with Othello. In this blur of action, they married in a private ceremony performed by a sympathetic friar and then retired to an inn on the Sagittary just off St. Marks. There Othello and his virgin bride experienced the most long-awaited, tender, true and passionate lovemaking of the bridegroom's well-travelled life.

The secret union of Othello and Desdemona was no rash act born of the impetuous nubile lust of an adolescent Romeo and Juliet. Oh, no. Theirs has been a considered affair that has grown out of many hours of conversation alone in each other's company when Othello was a frequent and "loved" guest of Desdemona's father in her family home.⁵ In their time together, Othello shared in intimate discourse with Desdemona the trials and tribulations of his harsh and solitary life as a soldier of fortune, and a brave one at that.⁶

As a wanderer and adventurer cast upon fate, Othello has many a story to tell – and Desdemona was rapt to hear the accounts of his youthful escapades. The battles and sieges which he endured by sea and land. The perils he encountered in strange new worlds that led him close to death's door. How he came across men whose heads grow beneath their shoulders. And how he foiled the Anthropophagi, men who eat men. Othello recalled to the young noblewoman's fascination scenes of extreme physical endurance – traversing vast caverns and canyons, outlasting barren deserts, and scaling mountaintops that pierced the clouds. Yet nothing more harrowing did Othello impart to Desdemona than how the life he had been born into as the prince of a royal African dynasty was shattered when he was taken

prisoner “by the insolent foe” and “sold into slavery.” And how he escaped and was “redeemed hence” through his coming to Christ.⁷

These traveler’s tales would so enthrall Desdemona that she would listen for hours – only leaving Othello’s side to dispatch some domestic duty that befell her as mistress of her father’s household affairs. For in the absence of a wife to Brabantio and mother to his daughter, the charge of the home fell to Desdemona, his only child. When her task at hand was complete, Desdemona would return to Othello’s side where he patiently awaited her – she more eager than ever to hear more from this extraordinary man. But it was not only the thrill of adventure that captivated Desdemona. So tender-hearted was this gentle young woman that she wept openly to hear Othello recount a litany of extreme suffering. And she gave him for his pains “a world of sighs.” She swore a stirring oath, “‘twas strange, ‘twas passing strange. / ‘Twas pitiful, ‘twas wondrous pitiful...”⁸ Thus, it was over the course of time that Othello and Desdemona formed an empathic bond of mutual recognition, a marriage of true minds that kindled a deep-seated and mature love:⁹

OTHELLO. *She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.*
(Act 1, Scene 3)¹⁰

For Othello and Desdemona *Eros is Agape* (fig. 3).

Othello did not seduce Desdemona with the advantage of his male sex. He was not the first to speak of fond feelings. It was she who showed agency in turning their friendship into a romance, saying to a man some years her senior, as Othello reports it, “She... bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story / And that would woo her. / Upon this hint I spake...” Clearly, only after he was thus prompted by Desdemona, did

Othello proclaim his love. And then courtship proceeded in earnest. And eventually they agreed to wed.¹¹

Desdemona was no easy catch. Shakespeare has crafted her as a proto-feminist: a woman who knows her own mind and will act on it. For in the custom of her country, class and time, Desdemona was well past the age young women married, and had turned down many a suitor who sought her hand as unbecoming her high expectations. Instead she chose the Moor because a true communion of heart and mind mattered more to her than a concern for the color of Othello's skin, which for many of that time, especially for ladies of her rank, would have been an intractable objection. But not necessarily a disqualifier.

Witness the case of Alessandro de' Medici (see fig. 4), a sixteenth century duke of Florence. Although born illegitimately to an African-descended mother who was putatively either servant or slave in his noble father's household. Given his noble heritage, and recognized by his family, Alessandro was no doubt considered a prize husband by the ladies of his time for his wealth and position. It was a window of opportunity when class could still trump race, albeit within certain gradations of status.¹² Unfortunately, being a member of the nobility, even as a bastard son, was an advantage that leaves Othello short in the hierarchy of money and pedigree in the culture of his time.

So what happened next in the the case of Othello and Desdemona? Why the elopement? Did the couple tell Brabantio of their desire to marry and he refused to give consent, so they defied his express wishes? Or did Desdemona know her father's limits well enough to recognize that he could welcome, even profess love for a black man as a family friend, but to welcome him into the family as his daughter's husband was another thing. Especially when the General did not command the mitigating factors that inhered to the

aristocrat Alessandro de' Medici.

The scenario that assumes that Othello never presumed to ask Desdemona's father for his blessing to wed seems the more likely case. This is born out by Brabantio's apoplectic reaction expressed in a public spewing of racist invective at the discovery that Othello and Desdemona had secretly married. Why Othello thought he could overcome the fallout from Brabantio's objections would appear to be his sense of his own status with the Venetian leadership: "My services which I have done the Signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints."¹³

Venetians, who on the heels of Brabantio's discovery of Desdemona's duplicity passed underneath the senator's open window, or passed by the old man himself as he made his way along the street, heard his rant. So later did monarch and noblemen in the chambers of state governance. There they witnessed the normally courtly and hospitable elder statesman contorted in revulsion and horrified to distraction that his progeny would be of blood mixed with the African blackamoor. No amount of civic honor and high office conferred on General Othello by the Venetian state could wash this Ethiopian white enough to excuse the indelible stain of blackness on Brabantio's European patrician bloodlines.¹⁴

By now Brabantio has convinced himself that Othello has literally bewitched Desdemona with the potions and spells of a necromancer from an alien culture. There is in the Senator's mind no other justification for his daughter's transgressive behavior to marry outside her caste. "Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her," Brabantio charges Othello. Else she never would have consented to run "to the sooty bosom / of such a thing as thou."¹⁵

In making his case before the senate, Brabantio demands that Othello be brought up on capital charges for stealing his daughter.

Othello's great speech before the senate in his own defense, obviates Brabantio's charges and rightly recasts his marriage to Desdemona as a mutual bond of affection: "How I did thrive in this fair lady's love, and she in mine." But it is also clear from his words that Othello is not a seducer. He did not charm Desdemona with practiced words of courtship. In fact, it would appear that their love grew innocently, completely outside the norms of conventional wooing. Desdemona first hinted at her feelings before Othello had any thoughts that their friendship might turn romantic. After all, he spoke to her of the pain and trials of his life, not what he would imagine would be words to turn a lady's heart.

And as it turns out, the Duke is quite ready that night to ignore the noisome distraction of the personal crisis that consumes one of his senators. He has critical affairs of state for which he is desperately concerned – war is at hand – and the Republic of Venice has urgent need of its supreme military commander and cannot afford to effectively lose his services to a domestic drama.

Yes, General Othello will be getting a pass this night, especially after Desdemona speaks up as a responsible witness to Othello's honorable conduct towards her and reveals her complicity in their union, a union that she affirms in her account before the Duke and Signiory is anchored in true love. After Desdemona's testimony, the Duke puts an end to the controversy of their elopement by observing rationally and ecumenically, no doubt to the surprise of many, that he believes a man of such quality as Othello might "win my daughter too." This is a truly astonishing statement that speaks to a not yet baked in universalist color prejudice in Shakespeare's early modern world.¹⁶

For as Francisco Bethencourt writes in *Racism: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (2015), "racism is triggered by political projects and connected to economic

conditions. Racism can be fed or deterred by influential powers, and is channeled by a complex web of collective memories and sudden possibilities – a web that can change the forms and targets of racism.”¹⁷

Although Othello has counted on the fact that his service to the state would inure him from the worst of Brabantio’s demands for revenge, he nonetheless could not have anticipated fortune dealing him such an auspicious hand: It certainly is a bizarre twist of fate that an act war has eclipsed the fact that he has absconded with Desdemona in opposition to her father’s wishes. Nonetheless, it is Brabantio who gets the last word when he curses the union of Othello and Desdemona with these poisonous lines: “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee.”¹⁸

The war news that has Venice in such a state of high alarm comes from intelligence that the Turks are sailing with a massive fleet towards the city-state’s military outpost on the island of Cyprus (fig. 106). And it is Othello who is called upon as the singular martial talent considered able to thwart this sudden invasion that has the Ottoman Sultan primed to reclaim the island redoubt for himself. Considering the gravity of the times, it is no wonder that Duke and Signiory choose in this extreme emergency to place the Republic’s needs over the demands of an offended senator, even an aged and most esteemed one.

Taking the the news with alacrity that he will be dispatched to Cyprus, Othello begins instantly to ready to his expeditionary counter-force to embark for battle with the Turks. As for Desdemona, in her characteristic forthright fashion, it is the lady who in the midst of chaos takes matters into her own hands by asserting that she will go to Cyprus with Othello. She movingly proclaims that having cast her lot with the Moor she would rather be in a war zone far away with her lord than be left behind amid the ruins of her previous life. There can be no

other home for her than with her husband because she is an outcast in the world.

DESDEMONA. *That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honors and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind
A moth of peace and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.*

(Act 1, Scene 3)

With such determination and artful suasion in her speech, the Duke takes pity on Desdemona's orphaned state and she is allowed to follow Othello to Cyprus. The plan is for the lady to sail soon after the General's departure in the care of Othello's longtime comrade and trusted right hand man, Ensign Iago.

When the action of *Othello* shifts to Cyprus, it is to a scene of both joy in reunion and jubilant celebration of a miraculous turn of events that has staved off war. For just at the moment Othello and Desdemona are reunited on Cyprus shores, comes the incredible news that the Turkish fleet has been destroyed at sea in a terrible tempest. Thus the island is secure from imminent attack and the threat to the Venetian state from the Ottomites is over. Further to the action, the plan is for Othello to become the governor of the island, replacing the current Venetian occupying the office, Montano, an upright soldier and honorable gentleman who in the past has served under Othello.

Among the celebrants who gather at this auspicious moment with the General and his wife and Montano, are Othello's chief officers – Ensign Iago and Lieutenant Cassio. Michael Cassio, a Florentine, is a favorite of Othello's. And it is true that Cassio's reward in stirring Othello's affection is recently to have seen himself promoted to second in command by the General over his only other rival for the job, Iago – a man many years his senior. Othello will come to rue the day that he stirred Iago's animus by taking such action. This because a humiliated Iago believes that he has been passed over for a promotion he rightly deserves, and that Cassio is quite undeserving of his advancement. In Iago's view, Cassio is merely a foppish lightweight.

It is true that much of what brings young Cassio such special favor in life are his comely looks, his eloquent speech, and his courtly manners. All of which have branded the affable Michael a notorious ladies' man. If there was ever any thought to imagine Othello with a jealous bone in his body, the proof that this is not so would be in the knowledge that he had enlisted the silver-tongued Cassio – a more socially skilled and attractive, younger man than himself (or so Othello supposes) – as a go-between in his suit of Desdemona. The irony is that although Othello won Desdemona's heart as a raconteur of the art of war he does not trust himself to speak the art of love. And for providing this gentle service for his commander, Desdemona has come to love and trust Michael Cassio like a brother. With him she can enjoy a free and easy friendship.

Sink into the ugliest depths of the human condition and you will see how jealousy can fester into homicidal rage. *Othello* is about such rage. And it is Iago's rage, a malign malignancy, that is the driving force of this tragedy, not Othello's. It starts with Iago's determination to get revenge for the incalculable disappointment, the public shaming and

betrayal he feels he has endured at Othello's hand by losing his rightful commission to Cassio. And for his part in the matter, Iago despises Cassio. Still, in his jealousy, Iago despises Othello even more for favoring Cassio over him. All of Iago's pent up racism is unleashed in rage when the General demonstrates that he will not be an instrument for the Ensign's expected advancement. And Iago tells us quite simply and quite directly: "I hate the Moor."¹⁹

Warped by his feelings of persecution Iago has even toyed with the unwarranted suspicion, that Othello has made him a cuckold by sleeping with his wife Emilia. Like a chess master, Iago plots his revenge in careful and measured steps. Two-faced and unctuous to the extreme, Iago hides (although less from Emilia than others) his true feelings and his true nature: "I am not what I am."²⁰

From the sewage of a hateful imaginary stewed in racist spite and fueled by the provocation of his many perceived injustices, Iago has conceived a plot of deadly proportion to enact revenge against his alleged persecutor. And here is the case from the ensign's perspective: All the while Iago benefitted from Othello's advancement and could see the Moor's increasing power as a means to his own future prospects, he was fine playing the role of subordinate to the black general. But once Othello shows him no special regard, Iago's tamped down sense of white male privilege erupts and he is hell-bent on taking down the social climbing black man who has denied him his just reward.²¹

Such thinking taken to the maximum extent, places the true fault of the the situation in Iago's belief system that presupposes black Othello should never have achieved the success he has attained in the first place: the kind of success that gives the African outsider unnatural authority over his European white counterpart. In this universe of Iago's warped reality, he is

an injustice collector whose jealousy becomes a destructive force of deadly proportion.²²

Putting Iago's envy, and his determination to exact revenge for the supposed wrongs he has endured, forward as the causal element of the deadliness in Shakespeare's drama is more than a fanciful supposition: it is a theory that has been tested in scientific study.²³

It would be fair to say that Iago is as ingenious as he is immoral. And his malevolence knows no bounds. His venomous attacks on Othello are as ideologically irrational as they are personal. He is a racist through and through. The imagery of Africans as "blacke beasts" or "brutish blacke people" is an early modern European meme that Iago employs with zeal. When he speaks of Othello and Desdemona's union as man and wife, he calls it "making the beast with two backs." Iago carries his metaphor further to say that Othello is an "old black ram tugging" (rhymes with f***ing) Desdemona, a "white ewe." He calls Othello "thicklips" and "lascivious" and further bestializes him as a "Barbary horse." Embedded in European color prejudice of the day is this "tropical animality" and hypersexuality associated with Africanness, which Iago gives free voice to.²⁴

And the ensign takes pleasure in playing on Othello's deepest fears and insecurities as the Other who has fought a system stacked against him in every way to win fortune and favor. In his evil, Machiavellian genius, Iago has conceived a way to ensnare Othello, Desdemona, and Michael Cassio in a web of mutual annihilation. With vengeance as his guide all that is left for him to do is to carry out the deadly plot. If Iago can convince Othello that Cassio is betraying him by sleeping with Desdemona, he can destroy all three of them in the cascading flow of a revenger's tragedy.

Feigning love and loyalty, Iago picks at Othello's psyche by turning every aspect of his exceptionalism as a man of incalculable achievement into a man who questions his own

value. Iago makes the Moor's blackness an issue, knowing it is the chink in the armor of Othello's confidence. The Ensign has the General obsessing on concerns that speak to his now heartbreaking vulnerability: *Am I good enough for Desdemona? How can she love me, black as I am? Is it even possible for a man like me to expect to sustain her love?* And then tauntingly, Iago reinforces Othello's self-doubt in his every action, speech and gesture: *Why wouldn't Desdemona prefer Cassio over you, Othello? He is youthful, handsome, aristocratic and white. You are aged, brutish, rough-hewn and black.*

Now the jealousy that was never there before sets in because Othello's sense of his own inadequacy is plaguing his thoughts as he fears that he may not be secure in Desdemona's love. Iago has proven ingeniously effectively at sewing the seeds of doubt that implicate Desdemona in a supposed adulterous affair with Cassio. Into this looming shadowy situation comes Brabantio's cousin, Ludovico, straight from the Duke and Senate with a letter that relieves Othello of his Cyprus command and recalls the General to Venice. The uncertainty surrounding this turn of events is surprising at the very least. But adding insult to injury is the equally astonishing news that Lieutenant Michael Cassio is to replace General Othello as governor of the island. This is an act of extreme irony because not long before this Othello has had to relieve Cassio of *his* command for dishonorable conduct. And, no, the crime is not adultery.

It was the holiday spirit that erupted on the island in the wake of the dispersal of the Turkish fleet that has brought Cassio down. For it was not long after Othello and Desdemona retired early that celebratory evening, that the merry making among the Venetians troops gave over to excess. With Lieutenant Cassio expressly left to secure the town, the General should have been safe in the knowledge that order would be kept. But Cassio, egged on by Iago –

who knows the Lieutenant has no head for alcohol – joins in the drinking, against his better judgment. And soon it is Cassio himself who is the instigator in disrupting the peace and causing a near riot through his public drunkenness – just as Iago has set him up to do. What's worse is the Cassio get into a skirmish with Montano and wounds him severely.

Deeply disappointed that Cassio has mishandled his office and not lived up to the trust he has placed in him, Othello, known for his moral rectitude and belief in order has no choice but to suspend his Lieutenant from his leadership post. Having failed in his duty, Cassio is overcome with remorse and contrition for his foolish, brash and injudicious actions and is bereft over his loss of reputation.

This being the case, how can the promotion of Cassio at the behest of the Venetian leadership coupled with Othello's own recall from Cyprus be perceived by the General as anything other than a slap in the face? Is it the revenge of Brabantio? Everyone of course wonders at this, but, unfortunately, it is Desdemona who speaks aloud this awkward question, that hangs, pregnant in the air. And this only further rankles Othello. Even more intemperate is Desdemona's tone-deafness to her husband's foul mood and sense of disgrace before her kinsmen, when she allows herself to rashly blurt out that she is "glad on't" that Othello has been called home and Cassio will replace him in Cyprus as governor.

Why on earth would she say this? Maybe because at Iago's goading Othello has come to suspect his wife of sleeping with Cassio and has shown himself monstrous in his treatment of her without explaining the cause. So perhaps Desdemona would have them any where but on this island – the site where her marriage turned to misfortune. But her ill-considered words are just salt rubbed in Othello's psychic wounds. This is too much for him. Thus with embarrassment still stinging his own face from the proverbial slap he has received

from the Duke and Signiory, he literally strikes Desdemona across the cheek with the back of his hand for her rash words. This to the horror of all assembled, but most shockingly to her cousin Ludovico.²⁵

Poor Desdemona. By now nothing if not the plaything of fortune. The prior falling out between Cassio and Othello has perturbed her so that Othello's wife has taken Cassio's part in a well-intentioned effort to restore the disgraced officer to her husband's good graces, which he deems highly inappropriate. Every step she takes is a maladroit misstep.

It is Desdemona's innocent and tender-hearted natural impulse to reconcile Othello with Cassio, but it is a project initiated at Cassio's request, and suggested to him as a strategy by Iago. Iago's purpose in orchestrating this scheme is to wreak havoc between husband and wife and their close mutual friend by making Desdemona's championing of Cassio to Othello appear to be the actions of a woman in love. Consequently, every time Desdemona pleads to her lord on Cassio's behalf she appears to Othello as a wanton strumpet. Every word she utters feeds a broken ego that believes nothing she may say in either Cassio's defense – or ultimately her own – is innocent. All Othello hears is Desdemona defending her lover to her wronged husband.

Worked upon by Iago the Moor is further convinced that placing his heart and his trust in the woman he took as his wife was a mistake. What does this foretell? Will his marriage to Desdemona ultimately be the act of Othello's own undoing, after all? Will Brabantio's curse prove prophetic?

It is Iago's mastery of psychological manipulation that collapses not just a marriage but the social order. Into the growing climate of fear and mistrust that Iago has set in motion, like a master impresario he stages action to further his artful purpose. The wily and

unscrupulous Ensign plants multiple seeds of doubt that grow into a bumper crop of deception. A lost handkerchief that was never truly lost becomes a fatal prop in Iago's stagecraft. A dumb show that is set up to deceive in its intent and provide Othello the "ocular proof" he demands that Iago show him to prove Desdemona's betrayal: proof that he can see with his own eyes.²⁶

Othello's demand that Iago show him concrete evidence of his wife's adultery, is an extreme test. It is the point of no return. For it places Iago in a considerable position of risk. If he does not produce tangible evidence to support his calumny, the Moor will have his life for falsely accusing Desdemona. And when Iago delivers his "ocular proof," it both sickens and maddens the grief stricken General.

In a tour de force of duplicity that manufactures an alternative reality, Iago serves up all that Othello needs – all anyone would need – to indict Desdemona for being disloyal to her husband by sleeping with his best friend.

In the course of his conspiracy, Iago's intent has turned deadly. Playing his endgame, Iago succeeds in exhorting Othello to kill the innocent Desdemona. The heartbreaking victim of Iago's ruse Othello is ultimately convinced that rather than being his pure, faithful and loving wife Desdemona is in fact "that cunning whore of Venice,"²⁷ who "must die, else she'll betray more men."²⁸ Because of this distorted logic Othello views his action not as a murder but as a just sacrifice.

Iago's secondary plot to have Cassio assassinated has failed, and in the process letters that exonerate Cassio and expose Iago's guilt in his manipulation of the principal players comes to light. Wounded and bleeding, Cassio has made his way to the governor's house, only to come in on the terrible scene of Desdemona lying dead on her bed, a victim of her

husband's hands. If it had been Othello's plan to take his own life before in his despair, it is now an act of justice he will undertake to fell a murderer, as he faces the reality of what he has done to the person he loved dearer than any in all the world.

Othello is horrorstruck when he learns the truth of Iago's gross manipulation of his *free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so.*²⁹ What dooms Othello is that he could never have suspected that Iago, a man he had trusted for so many years, to be capable of such perfidy. Abject with guilt and prostrate with grief when he comes to terms with Desdemona's innocence and the reality of his own guilt, Othello draws his sword and in taking his own life avenges her death.

All that remains for the next governor of the colony to enact, a successor who would indeed be Cassio, is to bring Iago to face the full force of the law through torment and execution. But in the moment not a sign of remorse nor a word of justification would the cold-blooded villain offer to satisfy the horrified onlookers. And the impetuous murder of his own wife Emilia upon his sword in that very room when she chooses honor over her marriage vow of obedience to her husband, speaks to the depths of his degeneracy. And as he led away we note, to borrow from Brecht, "The swollen veins on his brow, showing / How exhausting it is to be evil."³⁰

Iago has been able to vanquish his enemies, Othello and Cassio because he knows them better than they know themselves. He sees through the hypocrisies of Cassio's character that have nonetheless not stopped his advancement. And he preys on Othello's credulity and capacity for self-doubt as he exploits Desdemona's state of denial and unguarded lack of self-preservation.

Soon Venice would learn of the lamentable death of their renowned general and the heartrending fate of his bride.

Othello's sterling reputation is such that this tragic murder-suicide elicits from his admirers not only horror, but talk of his former merits and the memory of his valiant acts. Though mostly it elicits the most profound pity from those who so loved Desdemona and Othello. For through his tears, at the very moment before he plunges cold steel into his own body, the shattered warrior has implored them to think of him as one who "loved not wisely, but too well." In his dying words, Othello castigates himself in his grief and horror for being so credulous that he, "Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe."³¹

Coda

In a small, quite old, book by Paul Mason called *Prospero's Magic* (1962), the author describes Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello*, as "the best evidence we can have about racial feelings in England three and a half centuries ago."⁽⁵⁹⁾ Mason offers with great simplicity and clarity some thoughts about Othello and Iago that I have found to be striking in their truth:

Iago, is a man disappointed in the world, which has never recognized his true merits and ability, a man coldly obsessed with sex yet unable to love – just the sort of man you would expect to be a racist. (66).

[Iago] could never have poisoned Othello's mind if Othello had not all his life struggled with this prejudice and overcome it by building up a persona, a mask to front the world, of calm, resolute and modest commander, unaware of prejudice. (67)

But it is his weakness that the mask which he fronts the world has had to be built up with such tremendous effort of discipline and repression that, once it cracks, it splits and falls apart. (73)³²

Othello's is an exceptional life. As a member of the early modern African diaspora who improbably rises to the heights of civic leadership in a closed European class system, his success is a singular accomplishment. By any measure of a man he has achieved much to become the commanding general of the sixteenth century Venetian armed forces. As a black man he has achieved the impossible. As a trusted leader and military commander he is a heroic figure, but his life does not end heroically – it ends in ruin and disgrace, derailed by a cruelty born of racism that has victimized him cruelly. Thus, we may say that Othello dies tragically, a tragic hero.

NOTES

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare With Historical and Analytical Prefaces, Comments, Critical and Explanatory Notes, Glossaries, a Life of Shakespeare and a History of the Early English Drama.*, ed. Evangeline O'Connor (New York: University Society, 1901), 255.

² Catherine Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence: The Life of Alessandro de' Medici* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.

³ Kim F. Hall, ed., *Othello, the Moor of Venice: Texts and Contexts*, 1st ed., Bedford Shakespeare Series (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 4.2.256. References are to act, scene, and line.

⁴ *Othello* (Hall), 1.2.20–60.

⁵ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.130.

⁶ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.135.

⁷ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.140–5.

⁸ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.162.

⁹ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.165.

¹⁰ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.169–70.

¹¹ *Othello* (Hall), 1.4.166–68.

¹² Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence*, 255.

¹³ *Othello* (Hall), 1.2.18–9.

¹⁴ Karen Newman, “And Wash the Ethiop White: Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*,” in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York, N.Y.: Methuen, 1987), 141–62.

¹⁵ *Othello* (Hall), 1.3.71–2.

¹⁶ *Othello* (Hall), 1.3.173.

¹⁷ Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁸ *Othello* (Hall), 1.3.294-5.

¹⁹ *Othello* (Hall), 1.3.369.

²⁰ *Othello* (Hall), 1.1.67.

²¹ “When Iago realised that all his efforts were invested in vain, this might have amplified his envy exerting Iago to behave extremely and showing him the path to crime. Would the play ended identically if Iago invested no effort in obtaining a promotion?” Jérémy Celse, “Envy in Othello Can Effort Explain Such a Tragic Issue,” *Cahiers Du CEREN, Département Management Des Organisations et Entrepreneuriat, Groupe ESC Dijon Bourgogne - LESSAC*, 2012, 23–39.

²² Janet Adelman, “Iago’s Alter Ego: Race as Projection in Othello,” in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen (New York: Garland, 1999), 111–30.

²³ Jérémy Celse, “Envy in Othello Can Effort Explain Such a Tragic Issue.”

²⁴ The quotes from the play come mostly from Act 1 Scene 3. For the quote on beasts and “animality” see David Brion Davis, “Constructing Race: A Reflection,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 14, doi:10.2307/2953310. As Francisco Bethencourt writes in *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*, “the debasement of inferior *castas* in the Iberian world could reach a level of dehumanization via animal metaphors transferred to northern European colonial cultures.” Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

²⁵ *Othello* (Hall), 4.1.230-4.

²⁶ *Othello* (Hall), 3.3.377.

²⁷ *Othello* (Hall), 4.2.94.

²⁸ *Othello* (Hall), 5.2.6.

²⁹ *Othello* (Hall), 1.3.383.

³⁰ Bertolt Brecht, “The Mask of Evil (Die Maske Des Bösen),” in *Brecht on Brecht: An Improvisation*, trans. George Tabori (New York: S. French, 1967), 14.

³¹ *Othello* (Hall), 5.2.357-8.

³² Philip Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 66-73.

PROLOGUE: PART 2

Most biographies are begun out of enchantment or affection; you read a poem and want to find the poet, you hear a statesman and are filled with admiration...

– Leon Edel, *The Art of Biography* (1985)³³

What you inherit, what you receive from a world that you did not fashion but that will do its best to fashion you, is at once beautiful and repellent. You somehow have to come to terms with what is ugly as well as what is precious.

– William Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Cure for Xenophobia* (2017)³⁴

I have my self-consciousness not in myself but in the other.

– Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832)³⁵

How Othello Touched a Life, My Life

As a little white girl growing up in the college town of Bloomington, Indiana, I lived in books – historical biography, great novels and drama. I always wanted to play the hero. I craved the capacity to act powerfully and independently in the world. And in the realm of make-believe, I could. This was my comfort. A female child born in the America of the fifties (I quickly learned) confronted culturally imposed restrictions on her opportunities. My parents did all in their power to bolster my defiance of gender pigeonholing in a world that offered scant reinforcement. And consequently, thanks to them, I started life feeling unusually empowered.

I was not daddy's little girl – I was my father's daughter.

My father, originally from Waterloo, Iowa, was Professor Leo F. Solt: a G.I. Bill, Columbia University-trained historian of what was then called Tudor and Stuart History. His specialization, which he taught in the history department at Indiana University, was the relationship between Church and State during the tempestuous and event-filled epoch of the English Reformation. Once when I was in third grade and home sick with tonsillitis, I told my father that I wanted to read a book – a “real book” – not a children's book. Accommodating my child's ambition, he handpicked from his study shelf a well-considered gift to me, J.E. Neale's biography of *Queen Elizabeth I*, a figure he knew I admired and would now know in greater depth.

Digging into this adult-size volume, heavy in my small hands as I curled up in my bed, I was enthralled by the heroic escapades of the fiery Virgin Queen. I remember most Gloriana, dressed all in white and girded in a silver doublet astride her grey charger, rallying

her army at Tilbury. The stakes were high. There was need to get the troops on board for a potential last stand on land in the wake of England's *seeming* naval victory over the Armada. The young monarch's address, a speech of rare authority and inspiration, captivated me for her demonstrable command of majesty and her laying claim to the office of not just queen of England but also *king*.³⁶ It was an extraordinary performance of her power and magnificence. Thanks to J.E. Neale, Elizabeth Tudor in one fell swoop inverted any received outlook on heroes that I had been culturally conditioned to buy into.

I was also my mother's daughter.

My mother, Mary Ellen Solt (also from Iowa) was a poet, a critic, and later, like my father, a professor at I.U. Her discipline: comparative literature, with a specialty in modern literature and the other arts. Although my mother became well-known as a modernist innovator – a concrete poet – from my earliest memory she quoted the Renaissance poet Shakespeare. That my mother introduced Shakespeare to me with care, feeling, and awe was the defining measure of my early life. Receiving Shakespeare initiated a special relationship with figure, culture, and language passed down from mother to daughter.

But it was not all reverence. We had fun with Shakespeare, too. Before she married, it was Shakespeare who eased my mother's chagrin at having to carry the Yorkshire surname of her English immigrant father, which was "Bottom." Reverend Arthur Bottom's daughter relished pointing out to *her* daughters – my older sister Catherine and me – that "Nick Bottom," a comical character lampooned in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might have been based on an ancestor of ours. Moreover, she told us, Shakespeare's Bottom – a working class bloke from the North of England – no doubt spoke a version of the same broad regional accent her preacher father had been mocked for in his native land. And

although Nick Bottom may have been the butt of the joke, as my mother noted – “a wondrous hairy ass” sporting donkey’s ears in “Bottom’s Dream” – still he was a wondrous hairy ass in the canon of the greatest poet of all time.

William Shakespeare, that improbable genius – himself a working class, self-styled artist entrepreneur, a provincial Midlands fellow at work and play in the City of London and its liberties, as Stephen Greenblatt has aptly framed him in *Will in the World* – was my kind of people.³⁷ I loved Shakespeare: the deviser of domains where girls who dressed as men held sway, where Juliet proposed to Romeo.

Shakespeare gave me agency.

1961, the year which marked the inaugural season of the newly anointed Royal Shakespeare Company, was also the year my father’s first sabbatical from teaching at Indiana began. Based on his well-received first book, *Saints in Arms: Puritanism and Democracy in Cromwell’s Army*, as a young Professor Leo Solt was extremely gratified to be awarded a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to do further research in London’s British Library for a new work on radical Puritan sects. As a family, we were to spend a whole academic year in the capital city of the historic homeland of the late Reverend Bottom, of Queen Elizabeth I, and, of course, Shakespeare. All in all, a year in England seemed a wonderful prospect to my six-year-old self.

London in 1961 still showed the ravages of The Blitz with mountains of rubble disquietingly present in random places around the city. And the facades of any number of England’s architectural treasures were still grievously pockmarked by Hitler’s *Luftwaffe*. The scars of war – many of them on the psyche of the English people – were a grim reminder of the unspeakable ravages of Europe’s second World War within a generation. These ravages

and the stories behind them were a shock to my incipient child's understanding as I realized that the British people in the 1960s were still imbued in the culture of that conflict.

My parents rented a house in an outer boroughs of Southeast London, on the High Street of Sydenham. Our 18th c. "Queen Ann's cottage" was the impossibly narrow half of a three-story duplex with a treacherous circular staircase leading to the attic bedroom I shared with Cathy. As children racing up and down those stairs, we were totally enchanted with our ancient, fusty, people-sized dollhouse.

The finances of grant-supported scholarship for professors were much more auspicious back in those days. Plus, the British cost of living index and the exchange rate on the pound were exceptionally favorable at the time to our American dollar-based household income. All of these factors combined allowed my parents to send Cathy and me to Oakfield Preparatory, a private school in the neighboring town of West Dulwich. So, bursting with pride in our smart new school uniforms, and escorted by our daddy, I remember us as two little sisters boarding a signature red, double-decker bus, and then a train, for our first day's commute to Oakfield.

When I arrived to take my seat as a student entering the "first form" (first grade to me), like all children experiencing the opening of a new school year I was both nervous and excited. Notably, the first form at Oakfield Preparatory was the only co-ed classroom in this all-girls school, but there was still a divide: girls sat with girls at shared work tables and boys sat only with boys. After getting situated two by two at our "desks," I found myself paired with a girl named Louise. It was not long after the class settled in that our teacher, Mrs. Compton, asked me to stand and introduce myself to my fellow first-formers as a visitor from America who would be attending class with them for the coming year.

I spoke bashfully, self-conscious because of my American accent, and acutely aware of the unfamiliar surroundings and the distance between me and my new classmates who were all friends with one another from having been together the previous year as kindergartners. As soon as I, the new girl, finished speaking and sat down, directly behind me, (just loud enough to reach my ears but not the teacher's), I heard a boy's voice hiss out these words, "My dad hates Japs and Americans."

Immediately, I was stabbed by a burning sensation at the back of my neck; it was as if this stunning invective had found a literal entry point into my body. As the fire pierced me, it crept upward, spreading quickly beneath my scalp as it traced the contours of my skull. Warmth invaded my ears and seeped down through my forehead and into my cheeks. Flushed scarlet, my face throbbing with the heat, I sat perfectly still. Eyes forward, I said nothing.

Later that same first day of school I was in the process of copying a lesson off the blackboard into my notebook when I made a spelling error. English school pencils – I soon realized in my need – did not come with erasers attached. What to do? A solution presented itself for my notice in the form of a rather large, smudgy eraser, inert on the tabletop between me and my desk-mate. Politely, I asked Louise if I might borrow her eraser. Without missing a beat, as if her words had been planned and rehearsed, she shot back at me: "You *dirty* American girl, I am not going to lend you my rubber!" Stunned, I had to fight back the onslaught of tears that instantly stung my eyes.

What I experienced in my Oakfield classroom on that day so long ago – a day I remember as if it were yesterday – was a classic case of Othering. To render someone "Other" is a construct. A construct manufactured upon fear of the diminution of self and a concern for the need to guard home-grown privilege. It is a consciousness that manifests like a cancer in

the threatened psyche of anxious individuals and communities that dictates the demonization of the alien outsider as other than self, and therefore suspect or inferior.

But let's get real. My "Othering" was a onetime freakish encounter. It was a happenstance likely born of nativist English resentment to American post-war dominance that filtered down from parent to child as the United States came to impose its will as a superpower on the global scene in the aftermath of Europe's near self-destruction. It connoted a historic xenophobia in the English national character exacerbated in the modern world by the decline and demise of Britain's centuries-old empire and the nation's consequent loss of power on the world stage.

In other words, my entering a first form classroom in England in 1961 as an American child was bad timing if I wanted to avoid being called out.

My childhood situation at Oakfield Preparatory hardly bears speaking about in the face of the Othering black children experience, and have historically experienced, in schoolrooms and on playgrounds across our own country, time out of mind. Within my personal orbit, I think of my African American friend who moved from Alabama to Ohio and was enrolled in a predominately white school whose persecution as Other was persistent and cruel and perpetrated *by her teacher*. I think of another African American friend who grew up in Arkansas and was told one morning by the little white girl she had played so happily with the day before that her mother had said that she could no longer play with her because she was black. And the Othering of black children in modern-day Britain is personally and painfully expressed by the British-Nigerian historian, and television host David Olusuga who grew up amid racism in Britain in the 70s and 80s when he says "black" meant "other" and "black" was unquestionably the opposite of "British."³⁸

Such soul-sucking experiences – repeated far too often in an America that even in the twenty-first century is by no means post-racial – destroy childhood innocence. These vicious and unwarranted assaults to a child’s self-esteem begin the ugly conditioning that tells a person of color that they live in a country that prides itself on its democracy, but allows some citizens to have privileges and others not. A country where privilege is based arbitrarily and abominably on the whiteness of your skin.

Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to white privilege on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in 1955 – the year I was born. As a result, my childhood was inflected with the horrifying images in the papers and on the evening news of fire hoses, German Shepherds, and the police with batons all harnessed as instruments of assault on peaceful demonstrators on the streets of America’s cities who had the temerity to demand their just do. Black Americans who merely wanted the citizenship rights the Constitution guaranteed them.

I was nearly of an age with the four beautiful little girls who died in the Sunday morning bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1963. This act of white supremacist terrorism struck home to me like no other of the time. It was the ignominious apogee of white America and the institutions of our democracy in the throes of both the denial of racial injustice and the act of denying racial equality. Things had to change. I watched as a recalcitrant America finally responded to the resistance coming from violated and oppressed black Americans demanding the civil rights that white America had so long kept from them by casting them as the Other.

I vividly remember Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech delivered just steps from the top landing of the Lincoln Memorial to throngs of people yearning for justice on the National Mall, was a wake up call to an indolent government that

white America had indeed defaulted on a promissory note to black America.³⁹ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed to fulfill the promise of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution passed in 1868. Finally, after nearly one hundred years, the citizenship rights and equal protection of the law promised to African Americans were to be secured.

Yet today, the legacy of slavery and the legal segregation characterized as Jim Crow are not a thing of the past. They persist in the daily injustices and deprivations of de facto segregation, and in the continuing denial of voting rights through back channels and gerrymandering. And they persist in the insidious, standard violations of personhood that define the experience of second class citizenship for African Americans as normative. They persist in the ongoing fear of violence that must fill the consciousness of every black person in this country if they are to survive.

As for my own small experience with “Othering,” fortunately, it would not be long before *the weight of meaning* would eclipse the hurt of the actual events that occurred in my English schoolroom, events that featured me as an unwelcome American outsider to my then new first form cohort of untrusting English school mates. It is that weight of meaning that keeps the memories of me as a small child, rejected and humiliated, so alive within me today as a productive force. A force that triggered my early consciousness and brought me to a capacity for empathy through experiencing the ruinous consequences of bigotry on an individual life – starting with my own life.

It was through Shakespeare that I found my understanding of what happened to me at Oakfield that day so long ago, and it was through Shakespeare (fig. 2) that I found the strength to continue to grow from the shock and pain of an encounter with prejudice that would shape my life.

As fate would have it, not long after the incidents at Oakfield, the Solt family made a day-trip to Stratford-upon-Avon. It was a pilgrimage to the birthplace of the man many simply call The Bard. We were slated to see a play of Shakespeare's performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company that day in Stratford (see fig. 187). It was the first professional performance of any kind that I had ever seen. The play was *Othello***Error! Reference source not found.**

I had been aptly prepared by my parents, as best a child could be, for what I was to see on stage that afternoon in Stratford. The plotline had been explained to me. And even before the performance began I was deeply curious. I sat poised on the edge of my seat throughout the matinee, the character Othello so engaged me even as a little girl that I wept at the horror of the evil that vilified this great, good man for the supposed transgression of loving outside his race. The picture I have indelibly etched in my brain is that of Iago triumphant, even as his treachery is uncovered, his face contorted into a rictus of contempt for black Othello.

The meaning I took away from viewing so long ago the RSC's stage production of Shakespeare's tragedy of love between a black man and his white bride was transformative. What had happened between me and my Oakfield schoolmates gave me an immediate *in* to what I witnessed on the Stratford stage, that is – what it means to be Othered. Like Othello, I, too had experienced the acute pain of senseless bigotry.

That my English schoolmates could harbor such hostility towards me, without even knowing me, awakened in my tiny person a powerful affinity with Othello as the recipient of such essentializing hatred. What was aroused was more than just my compassion for Othello. Rather, I had cause to self-identify – to conflate Othello's experience with my own. It was a feeling so much deeper than the naïve, idealized romanticism of a child's familiar hero

worship projected onto a remote figure. I had made a reciprocal connection. In *Othello*, I saw the Other and he returned my gaze.

Great art has the power to jangle the raw nerve in the deepest recesses of our psyches. *Othello* penetrated to the very core of my being. Shakespeare's play gave me a personal language for that hurtful, shameful encounter in my Oakfield classroom. It was that I could see myself as Other through my whiteness that made *Othello* a touchstone for me. Recognizing *Othello* was the most formative experience of my affective life. Through *Othello* I came to consciousness. In the commensurability of the moment I understood the injustice of persecution based on arbitrary differences: It had happened to me – it could happen to anyone – it should happen to no one. Knowing *Othello* gave me the strength to overcome the divide of hate and befriend the little boy and girl who had vilified me on such needless grounds and moved me to prove to them that their prejudice was wrong – because all prejudice is wrong.

Othello taught me to understand my privilege in whiteness. And through the experience of seeing the play in its Stratford setting I came to realize the privilege of circumstance I also enjoyed. Privilege comes with great responsibility. Those of us whose are in a position to effect change must insure that this country is dedicated to embracing all its people. We must recognize that diversity is our inherent strength. And we must strive for community that embraces all people and all cultures – a community that is not afraid to address difficult political and social issues. And always within the context of mutual respect.

Othello marked me with an abhorrence of injustice. Applying lessons learned globally, the encounter with *Othello* presented me with a vector for racial understanding. I embraced the idea that all of humanity inheres to a single moral community. Knowing *Othello* made me a true citizen of what I value as a diverse and inclusive world.

Unfortunately, that is not the world we are reinforcing through our politics and our public discourse in America today. Rather than talk of equity and inclusion we are talking about people's investment in their whiteness and witnessing the invocation of white privilege as never before in the twenty-first century. It comes from the rise of a political culture that is steeped in hatred and gripped in fear of the Other. The Muslim ban and exhortations to build a wall on the Mexican border to keep out immigrants, immigrants of color, are the key Trumpian tenets of a people hanging on desperately to the vestiges of power that are anchored in their white identity – a status they fear they are losing.

What is so remarkable about spectator reaction to *Othello*, is that ultimately it does not depend on the particular identity or history of the person or persons in the audience: the stunning impact of the play is the shock of recognition of self in the Other, the empathy it arouses in everyone. Now more than ever, the play's exposure of the tragic effects of racism on individual lives still shocks because this reality persists. The play remains a cautionary tale, a heartbreaking and deeply unsettling experience.

And I have to ask, have we learned nothing in 400 years?

The Experience of Empathy / The Science of Reading

Literary fiction invites us to enter imaginatively into the lives of others. To shed tears or cheer for a character who engages our feelings of empathy and compassion. This is only amplified on the stage. Our minds tell us it is a representation but our emotions tell us it is not. It is what the Greeks called mimesis.

Empathy for the plight of the tragic hero is what Aristotle saw as central to Greek drama. It is a notion that has persisted over time. To empathize with the hero is to identify with him and to grant him the pity that Aristotle proscribed.

The technique of literary metaphor employed to absorb our feelings – to engage our compassion – is pathos. Pathos is a rhetorical strategy the Greeks utilized to communicate, to achieve a looked-for connection with the spectator. As Aristotle put it, the desired effect was “awakening emotion (*pathos*) in the audience so as to induce them to make the judgment desired.”⁴⁰ To have them relate. It is empathy that makes us citizens of conscience. The spectator’s experience of *pathos* results in a purgation or cleansing of the soul. An act which Aristotle called *catharsis*.

Shakespeare is a master of the cathartic discharge of extreme emotion that in its release yields a transcendent renewal of the spirit. Catharsis is a transactional power forcefully evoked that expresses our collective humanity in dramatic action. *Othello* sits at the intersections of race, history, culture, and politics. In *Othello* the particular meets the universal in a collision of emotion that touches the condition of the viewer. What I experienced when I saw *Othello* on stage at the RSC was catharsis.

It is now possible to assert that the effect of pathos and catharsis and their capacity to impact our lives is proven science. In October 2013, social psychologists Emanuele Castano, a professor at the New School for Social Research, and David Comer Kidd, a Ph.D. candidate there, published a paper titled “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind” in the journal *Science*. Castano and Kidd begin by observing: “The capacity to identify and understand others’ subjective states is one of the most stunning products of human evolution.”

This understanding “is a crucial skill that enables the complex social relationships that characterize human societies.”

In the realm of neuroscience, the capability of the human brain to chart or plot other people’s intentions is called “theory of mind” (ToM).⁴¹ After running a series of experiments, Castano and Kidd, concluded that engagement with a work of literary fiction also improves a person’s performance on tests measuring affective and cognitive responses. This phenomenon occurs as we find ourselves identifying with the feelings of fictional characters and even projecting ourselves into their motives and behaviors. “Fiction seems...to expand our knowledge of others’ lives, helping us recognize our similarity to them ... and reduce the strangeness....”⁴²

Another team of researchers at Ohio State University, studies the phenomenon of how an emotional response extended to a fictional character evokes a corresponding biological response in the recesses of our brains, which they document through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). “When you ‘lose yourself’ inside the world of the protagonist while reading a story, you may actually end up changing your own behavior and thoughts to match that of the character,” the Ohio State scientists have found.⁴³ People who went through what the researchers there call “an experience-taking process while reading about a character who was revealed to be of a different race or sexual orientation showed more favorable attitudes toward the other group and were less likely to stereotype.”⁴⁴

The conclusion to be drawn from the New School and Ohio State cognitive studies is that people who read literary fiction had improved relative empathy and social adroitness over those who did not. Thus in a morally instrumentalist way we may conclude that the encounter with works of art created by a great writer is an enhancer of positive social behavior by

honing our real-life interpersonal skills. “It allows successful navigation of complex social relationships and helps to support the empathic responses that maintain them,” Comer and Kidd observed.⁴⁵ The value of reading great literature has long been anecdotally asserted, but now brain science shows this to be truer than we ever imagined.

That literature should evoke this effect is not so surprising considering that any act of empathy – feeling the pain of others, understanding the pain of others - requires exercising the imagination. After all, how else can we enter into another’s experience without our own imaginative projection into the condition of their existence? Watching Shakespeare’s *Othello* on stage for the first time caused me to do just that – to enter into another’s experience. The capacity to subsume the knowledge of the actor’s identity into a character’s very real presence was a profound experience for me.

After that, I was inherently drawn to the theater as the arena to investigate the mystery of feelings. It fascinated me no end that I could be induced to feel something by actors on a stage – be completely aware of the formation of those feelings within myself that they were being presently constructed by the theatrical experience, but still be profoundly moved. It is through the medium of theater that Shakespeare expresses what we all know to be true, a self-referential extension of human consciousness, expressed so exquisitely, so hauntingly, that we simply gasp to hear it.

That day I saw *Othello* on stage in Stratford a lifelong passion was born in me – a determination to oppose racial prejudice and combat injustice of all stripes. I saw in drama the power to transform consciousness. Thereafter theater, that magic world of live storytelling, would be my life.

Ira Aldridge

In the 1973, in pursuit of my theater studies I enrolled at Smith College. I only spent one semester at Smith, but my time there was nothing short of transformative for a class I took with the prominent historian of the theater, Helen Krich Chinoy. The first paper I ever wrote in college was on the African American tragedian, Ira Aldridge (see fig. 5). This was the beginning of my academic study of *Othello*. And even with my first foray into scholarship I was stymied by a lack of sources. I had one book to draw on as the single foundation for my essay. I was so taken with the subject of Aldridge's career as the first black actor to play Othello on the legitimate stage that I simply accepted this deficit. Thankfully, so did my professor. The book I had available to me was the quite wonderful and extensive biography of Aldridge by by Herbert. Marshall and Mildred Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian*, that was first published in 1958 and available to me by order at a local Northampton bookstore in a 1968 paperback reprint edition.

Aldridge, self-styled the African Roscius, had his major break in London, March 1833, at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden when he replaced the most eminent actor of his day, Edmund Kean (fig. 184), who had collapsed onstage playing Othello. As you can very well imagine, Aldridge was met with violent anti-black criticism, but he was also praised by some for his naturalness and authenticity in the part. The actor went on to have a very significant career touring Shakespeare in the provinces of England and in Germany and Eastern Europe with a troupe he assembled.

It was an extraordinary eye-opener for me to study Ira Aldridge because it became clear that I had never before considered the racial politics of Shakespeare. I suddenly

understood the issues attending the kind of blackface performance of Othello that I had seen in Stratford as a child.

I encountered Aldridge again in the late seventies when I visited his grave in Lodz where he died on tour. I was in Poland thanks to Helen Chinoy who had also exposed me in class at Smith to the avant-garde innovator who I was now working with, Jerzy Grotowski. I pretty much owe Professor Chinoy the credit for the introductions that have made my career in so many ways.⁴⁶

Othello, Touching Young Lives

For many years I worked professionally as a producer of theater as well as feature films. I was a professional storyteller. This book about Othello I present to you here embodies a different way of telling stories. But perhaps not so different after all. It is my aspiration to render historical worlds with the narrative force and flow of fiction. My purpose in taking up this subject is to delve into the internal and external influences that informed Shakespeare's writing of *Othello*, and in doing so tell the story of Othello's life.

With a career as a film producer (*Presumed Innocent* and *Doc Hollywood* for Warner Bros.) and as a studio executive (Miramax) behind me, and with many years as Dean of the School of Theater at CalArts and now as Dean of the Arts at UC Santa Cruz, as well, I am gratified now to be making a learning journey as a teacher and a scholar with this book. Through this Othello project I have devoted my endeavors to a critical and historical inquiry into the nature of race (and the corollary matrices of gender, sexuality, and class) linked to a lifetime of professional arts practice. This turn to scholarship as a professional activity comes

from my decision to focus on the critical, dramaturgical side of my producing métier rather than the production of live performances or films.

The impulse that brought me to my Othello topic begins with the African American student actors I have taught over the years. For nearly a decade, while I was dean, I participated in student auditions for admission into CalArts MFA and BFA acting programs conducted by the iconic African American actress Fran Bennett, then Head of Acting /Director of Performance in the School of Theater. Performing a Shakespeare monologue was (and still is) required of every acting candidate who would study at CalArts. This is not surprising considering the mastery of a Shakespearean monologue is still the standard benchmark for admission into any professional actor-training program in the United States or Great Britain. And nearly every African American young man Fran accepted into CalArts auditioned with one of Othello's magnificent monologues. Othello was where our prospective black actors mostly located themselves in Shakespeare's canon.

After I stepped down as dean, I created a class for graduating students – a seminar in professional practice, designed as a bridge to a career in the arts, entitled “Entrepreneurship: The Artist as Entrepreneur.” Over and over throughout the years, the young artists in my classroom would create their “Goals” assignment. It was not long before I began to see a recurring pattern among the African American actors. Invariably, to play Othello would make the list of their career goals. Imagine, to play Othello was a choice made freely; it was not a solution to an institutionally imposed requirement. It was the *sine qua non* of artistic achievement. Othello offered these young men the opportunity to play the lead in a play where the tragic hero looked like them. Not just an opportunity to play the lead but *be* the lead in a Shakespearean drama.

Inspired and touched by this devotion to *Othello*, it became my mission to give these black artists – frankly all African-descended people - ownership of *Othello* by providing them with a personal stake in the history of Shakespeare’s text. A proprietorship that white culture and Western history had denied them. Because I so loved the play, I felt an obligation to correct the record people whose European heritage I share had written. As a woman – someone whose identity and history also has been marginalized and denied – I felt a connection. A connection underscored by my Oakfield experience. Now *Othello* would provide the means to right an injustice in the historical canon if I could locate him within a context that revealed information about the presence of Africans in early modern Europe.

With rigorous training and a recommitment to my formal education, (which had to that date culminated in a practice-based MFA course of study at the Yale School of Drama), I determined that I would equip myself to write *Othello* into history – and thus contribute a singular narrative of blackness to challenge received information. Consequently, in the process of telling *Othello*’s story, I set out to earn a master’s degree in Afro-American Studies and a doctorate in history at UCLA to underpin and legitimize this all-absorbing project.

Historians tend to shy away from commenting on our current age, the experiences through which we are actively living, for fear of the charge that they distort the past to serve the present. But it makes no sense to me not to acknowledge that I bring insight to my topic – the topic of how race and racism have been constructed in the annals of history and the tentacles of its effects – from my own, long, personal lived experience as well as from deeply considered historical investigation. Simply, dispassionately reporting the events is not enough for me. I will take on the role of the commentator. Sometimes I think of myself more like a cultural journalist travelling back in time rather than your classic historian. Someone invested

in the investigation, like a public intellectual: an opinion-maker writing in the op-ed section of a newspaper. I leave it to the reader to determine if I pass the test through my presentation of a breadth of evidence and scholarly analysis as to whether or not I have earned the right to be considered a reliable source.

I confess to wearing certain trappings of an activist. My activism is paying it forward. I want to make a difference with my work as a cultural entrepreneur. That is, to dedicate myself to projects that reflects my profound commitment to inclusion – to diversity and equity – which are values I promote in the classroom and to the communities where I serve and have served in a leadership role. And to do so through the production of knowledge.

If now more than ever, Shakespeare’s play exposes us to of the tragic effects of racism on individual lives. And if Othello’s story persists as a cautionary tale that both universalizes and personalizes the heartbreak and deeply unsettling experience of racism, let us learn something from *Othello* after all these years and make a difference in breaking the cycle of white privilege and oppression.

NOTES

³³ Leon Edel and Jeanne McCullough, “Leon Edel, The Art of Biography No. 1,” *The Paris Review*, no. 98 (Winter 1985), <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2844/leon-edel-the-art-of-biography-no-1-leon-edel>.

³⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare’s Cure for Xenophobia: What ‘The Merchant of Venice’ Taught me about Ethnic Hatred and the Literary Imagination,” *The New Yorker*, July 3, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/10/shakespeares-cure-for-xenophobia>.

³⁵ Hegel and Peter C Hodgson, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 1: Introduction and the Concept of Religion*. (Oxford University Press, UK, 2008).

³⁶ J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958).

³⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

³⁸ David Olusoga, “The Reality of Being Black in Today’s Britain,” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/30/what-it-means-to-be-black-in-britain-today>.

³⁹ “‘I Have a Dream’ Inscription,” accessed August 17, 2017, <http://mallhistory.org/items/show/35>.

⁴⁰ Aristotle and George Alexander Kennedy, *Aristotle On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 119.

⁴¹ David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” *Science* 342, no. 6156 (October 18, 2013): 377–80, doi:10.1126/science.1239918.

⁴² Kidd and Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind.”

⁴³ Jeff Grabmeier, “‘Losing Yourself’ in a Fictional Character Can Affect Your Real Life,” The Ohio State University. Research and Innovation Communications News, May 7, 2012, <https://news.osu.edu/news/2012/05/07/exptaking/>.

⁴⁴ Grabmeier, “‘Losing Yourself,’ in a Fictional Character can Affect Your Real Life”

⁴⁵ Kidd and Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind.”

⁴⁶ Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968).

INTRODUCTION: Who Was Shakespeare's Othello and Why Should We Care?

Shakespeare is like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see.

– Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1964)⁴⁷

Perhaps this is the lesson to draw from Othello,” Ghanaian actor Hugh Quarshie suggests as he prepares to play Othello at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, June, 2015: “that the play’s history on stage uncovers as much about the societies in which it appears as the play itself.

– Andrew Dickson, *The Guardian*, 2015⁴⁸

A Shakespeare performance is not a magical realm where race stops signifying, but an opportunity to intentionally challenge whiteness.

– Andrew Carlson, *American Theater*, 2017⁴⁹

The term ‘black’ or African-American not only denotes race, it denotes condition and carries with it the vestige of slavery and the social segregation and abuse of opportunity so vivid in our memory.

– August Wilson, *The Ground on Which I Stand* (1996)⁵⁰

Othello, His Story

In 1604, during an age when poetry wielded power in the public sphere as political critique and social commentary, Shakespeare introduced onto the London stage his “noble Moor” as the hero of a tragedy. A heretofore demonized and lampooned creature of English Renaissance drama – “the blackamoor” – was suddenly rendered as a sympathetic and suffering, sentient human being: an honorable man cruelly victimized for nothing more than racist spite. Shattering racial stereotypes, for the first time in the Western canon an African held moral agency, compelling king, and commoner alike to feel deeply for him. It was a moment of unprecedented commensurability when the Western gaze saw itself reflected in the “Other” – and his name was Othello.

In that moment of empathy, when the Englishman could weep openly for the black African other as if for himself, was the birth of a modern Western consciousness of a shared human condition that could transcend race. The theatrical advent of Shakespeare’s play about “the Moor” was “the first public contestation of blackness in English culture” and from that point forward *the black image in the white mind* would never be the same.⁵¹

The history of the representation of blacks in European culture reflects disjunction and paradox. It is important to keep in mind that color-coded prejudice is fluid, not absolute, and is full of contradictions. From early on Western Civilization has relied on a semiotic system of color, built on a Manichean mindset that defines black as base and undesirable: the forces of Darkness. And white as purity and perfection: the forces of Light.

For Europeans, the Bible, with its stories of the development of Christianity in far away foreign lands, and non-gospel based Christian legends, also mirror this. In Christian culture

the devil is presented both metaphorically and physically as black: black in deeds and black in skin color to correspond to his personification of sin and pure evil. And this is certainly how Satan appeared in the performances of Medieval Mystery plays throughout England during Shakespeare's boyhood that dramatized stories from the Bible.⁵²

Although blackness as the-devil-incarnate emerged as an early conceit in Christian culture, we also find across the European continent concurrent positive black iconography in religious art. African archetypes of elite status include: The Black Madonna and the black African military hero, the Crusader St. Maurice as well as St. Benedict the Moor, born a slave in sixteenth century Italy.⁵³ Also, the African king – the Black Magus, depicted in scenes of the nativity – was a particularly popular and enduring trope from the medieval period into the Renaissance.⁵⁴

The legend of Prester John, a Christianized black king who spread the Savior's teachings deep into the continent of Africa, was also in circulation in Shakespeare's day thanks to the Elizabethan cosmographer Richard Hackluyt's reprinting of Sir John Mandeville's account of the Prester in his famed *Principall Navigations* in 1589.⁵⁵

That Shakespeare got Jacobean theatergoers across the spectrum of race, class and gender to self-identify with Othello in such a personal way, must be seen as possible not only because of his vision and skill as a writer "who emptied whatever private self there was into his public relations,"⁵⁶ but also as a result of something shifting in the tenor of the times. My research has led me to the discovery that in Shakespeare's lifetime England was nurturing both prejudice against racial others (the visible minority) and the seeds of tolerance that could develop because the English were yet to become the slave-trading nation that emerged less than fifty years after Shakespeare's death in 1616.

Artists are cultural content creators; they contribute to the production of knowledge. As Stephen Greenblatt suggests in his seminal treatise, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*: “Literature functions...in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself an expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection on those codes.”⁵⁷ Human identity, and consequently Shakespeare’s identity in his work, can be seen to be shaped (or rather fashioned as Greenblatt would have it) by social as well as individual forces.⁵⁸

Just as art history and the study of visual culture provides us with images that reveal the past and are thus an integral part of the story of the past, so, too, does the theater offer up the playscript – a representation of lived experience – as a meaningful approach to history as a record of social behavior.⁵⁹ Not theater history, and not just the theater in history, but theater *as* history.

Thus, Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a cultural product embedded in historical context that both interprets and reflects the social scaffold that formed and influenced it. As dramatic text, it has not only artistic merit but also informational value. Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a depiction in literature of the reality within which it was conceived.

So why did this play script – this *Othello* – appear in early modern English culture when it did? What social truth does it instantiate?

The nature of artistic genius is to see things not readily apparent or understood at large and express through image or literature such insight in advance of public discourse. Indeed, in all of Shakespeare’s plays there is a spectatorial dimension: the play maker who responded with a liberal imagination to the social and intellectual conventions of Elizabethan and Stuart England and the burgeoning international Atlantic world to which his dramatic works belong.

Mimesis

What does Othello say about what Shakespeare was living and observing?

Aristotle in his *Poetics* called the dramatist's creative response to the way human beings live and act *mimesis*. It is the liminal space between nature and artifice. The shifting of perceptions is art's most central device. The more faithfully mimetic a literary work is wrought through the eyes of the artist, the greater its capacity to augment our own humanity through conversant understanding.

Erich Auerbach in his now famous postwar treatise, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, calls Shakespeare's literary engagement with reality "perspective consciousness." Auerbach assigns Shakespeare this unique definition because the playwright not only reflects cultural verities, he effects critical shifts in social perceptions.⁶⁰ His plays not only signify, they participate in their world. Indeed, it can be argued that Shakespeare's works limned the age in which he lived.⁶¹ And somewhere along the way what Shakespeare created as popular entertainment was repurposed as high art.

By providing the collective symbols to represent the internalized values of the individual, this provincial poet from Stratford defined values for society as a whole. Shakespeare created the links between the personal, the communal and the social. He understood the stage as a forum for civic converse. Shakespeare was a master of public discourse – and in a language much of which he invents.

Othello tells us not just the story of man with all too human failings, but about the moment in which the play itself was written and the then current societal issues. The play – although fiction - is an instrument both for historical understanding and for making history.

In English drama, “Othello became the defining representation of the ‘Moor.’”⁶² And in Elizabethan masques, pageants, poems and plays, the word “‘Moor’ became synonymous with ‘black African’.”

Shakespeare wrote during a momentous time in human history. European expansion into Africa and the New World meant that the landscapes of Old Europe were expanding dramatically into the vistas of the unknown. Time-honored assumptions anchored in cultural norms – such as religion and geography - were no longer relevant. Life was at the very least tantalizing – for some terrifying. The future was uncertain.

The emergence of Othello on the stage, this historical inflection point when the white Englishman acknowledged the black African’s humanity as commensurate to his own, speaks to the uniquely transformational power of the theater, when it is prime. As August Wilson, the great twentieth-century African American playwright and chronicler of the black experience tells us: “Theater can do that. It can disseminate ideas, it can educate even the miseducated ... because it is art, and all art reaches across that divide that makes order out of chaos and embraces the truth that overwhelms with its presence and that connects man to something larger than himself and his imagination.”⁶³

Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate marvels that what Shakespeare achieved by “weaving oppositional racial discourse in the fabric of *Othello*” is nothing less than the “inversion of the age’s expectation that a Moor will always be barbarous and a [European] civilized.”⁶⁴ This successful reversal of what was the customary assignment of early modern audiences’ loyalties from white man to black man is Shakespeare’s radical intervention into the cultural politics of his time. It is quite striking to consider that what this brilliant poet of the stage wrought is an unparalleled internalization of the Other and the transposition of

sovereignty from self to other during a period of hitherto unchallenged European cultural chauvinism.

That Shakespeare is able to achieve this volte-face in received expectations in the context of an African man of substance crossing the color line of social convention to elope with a European gentlewoman speaks to the genius of his moral suasion.

Nothing could be more challenging as a seventeenth century literary strategy than gaining sympathy not only for a black man, but for a black man who secretly absconds with a white man's daughter and thwarts her father's anticipated objections. The tension of interracial encounter was a dominant concern of the expansionist early modern European imperial world with its fear of cultural diminution from race mixing with foreign peoples.

To mix blood was a potent taboo. Blood was fetishized. The fetish-ization of blood in author Toni Morrison's words "was particularly useful in evoking erotic fears or desires and establishing fixed and major difference where difference does not exist or is minimal." She goes on to say: "Fetish-ization is a strategy often used to assert the absolutism of civilization and savagery." Hence, blood, (still in Morrison's words) "is a pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex."⁶⁵

We see these sentiments played out in Iago's vitriol, the screed of a disapproving white man, against the union of Othello and Desdemona. The outraged Iago uses language that is frenzied, alarmist and apocalyptic when he rouses Desdemona's father from his bed with the news that his daughter has eloped with the Moor:⁶⁶

*Sir, You're robb'd: for shame, put on your gown your heart is burst. You have lost half your soul... Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupp[ing] [f***ing] your white ewe. Arise, arise! / Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, / Or else the*

devil will make a grandsire of you. / Arise, I say! (1.1.92-101)

Shakespeare uses Iago (and others) to articulate Elizabethan stereotypes like “thick-lips” and “Barbary horse” in describing Othello in order to discredit them. By repeatedly putting into Iago’s mouth words that bestialize and demonize Othello, Shakespeare deftly sets up a choice for his audience that is really no choice at all. Either they must ally their empathy with a good and noble black man of unimpeachable character and see racism as a social sickness that deforms the soul and corrupts the heart – *or* they must embrace the racist Iago and his acts of murderous betrayal, which the playwright in his skill makes it impossible to do without forfeiting your humanity.

It is unequivocally the white man, Iago, who is at fault in Shakespeare’s world of the play, not black Othello. A stunning reversal, indeed, of received stereotype.

Important archival work conducted over the past several years, serves to further counter the prevailing conventional wisdom of denial: *Black and Asian Londoners: Presence and Background 1536-1840* is the name of a project currently conducted by the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), which has for over a decade now engaged volunteer researchers to comb the parish registers for entries that document the presence of Afro-Britons in the City of London, including in Shakespeare’s time. These entries are mostly records of baptisms, weddings and burials. It is a painstaking task that has yielded striking results with entries in the hundreds – enough already to make a difference in our understanding of the demographics of the period. Enough to establish critical mass.⁶⁷

It is no longer possible to dismiss the representation of blackness in Shakespeare’s canon as merely imagined when he was living among black people. I have traced the footsteps of many black Londoners who were the poet’s neighbors and I have reconstructed his possible

encounters with them. These Afro-Britons were not slaves (although they may have come to London with Portuguese masters seeking refuge from the Inquisition) because slavery as a legal institution did not exist in England in this period. Most of these people would have been indentured servants living in the margins.

Some were musicians, some vendors and some were prostitutes: one woman we have record of received clients at an address in Turnbull Street, just a short walk from Shakespeare's lodgings on Silver Street when he was writing *Othello*. And we have evidence of at least three West African princes living in London at this time who Shakespeare could certainly have encountered.⁶⁸

Shakespeare also had knowledge of Africa. The express purpose behind Eldred Jones' stand-alone, groundbreaking work, *Othello's Countrymen*, published back in 1965, was to demonstrate "how greatly the Elizabethans' knowledge of the continent and people's of Africa has been underestimated by modern critics."⁶⁹ But it is only in the last twenty to thirty years (twelve of which I have been engaged with this project) that some, mostly literary scholars, have taken up this subject with serious intent, proving that Shakespeare's knowledge of Africa and Africans was much more extensive than previously imagined

Again, it was the cosmographer Richard Hacklyut and his protégé Samuel Purchas who were publishing all the travel narratives about Africa they could get their hands on. And these even included the logs of Tudor trade voyages to the coast of Guinea in West Africa that returned with African passengers to be trained as interpreters for future voyages. Of particular interest are the chronicles of Leo Africanus, translated by John Pory, and printed around the time Shakespeare was writing *Othello* – Leo the African, some speculate, is a true prototype for Shakespeare's Moor.

All this historical evidence of Shakespeare's world view of Africa sat for centuries unreconciled with the playwright's biography.

To say that Shakespeare was not affected by race and racial others because he did not know any black people is clearly counterfactual – but stereotypes and truisms die hard. In the preface to her book, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*, Gretchen Gerzina tells the story of casually asking a London bookshop clerk in the 1990s if the establishment might have a copy for sale of Peter Fryer's groundbreaking history of black people in Britain, *Staying Power* (1994). The response from the clerk, which so startled Gerzina, but which until very recently would have been more the norm than not, was, “Madam, there *were* no black people in England before 1945.”⁷⁰

As for the evidence which exists even in Shakespeare's own writing of a black presence in his world, Kim F. Hall has this to say: “A survey of scholarly editions of Shakespeare's canon demonstrates how modern literary criticism remystifies the appearance of blackness in literary works by insisting that references to race are rooted in European aesthetic tradition rather than in any consciousness of racial difference.”⁷¹ Edward Berry evokes “the weight of critical tradition” falling heavily into a pile “that presents a Shakespeare who finds racial and cultural difference insignificant and who assimilates his Moor into ‘the human’ condition.”⁷²

But in a series of love sonnets to his so-called “Dark Lady,” Shakespeare makes it very clear that he is in love with a woman of African descent. Again, rather than accept the evidence as written, critics prefer to see these poems as a metaphorical discussion that extends to beauty – that is to English dark-haired and dark-eyed beauties. But this is an impossible stretch. At issue is Shakespeare's grappling with the understood conventions of the sonnet

that follow the standards of Petrarch's model, which recognizes true beauty only in the convention of creamy whiteness "signified by the preferred color-scheme of gold, white, and red."⁷³ Think, portraits of Queen Elizabeth I in white pancake (fig. 135).

Shakespeare's sonnets (fig. 6) were first published in 1609 as a quarto (five years after the first recorded performance of *Othello*) though they could have been written earlier. In the sonnets, we see the poet work out in his verse just how to handle this unusual circumstance of his love of a dark-skinned woman in light of the cultural, aesthetic, and literary rules he is expected to adhere to.

In Sonnet 130 (fig. 7), Shakespeare catalogues his lover's African features in clear opposition to familiar tropes of whiteness: *My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; / Coral is far more red than her lips' red; / If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun [brown]; / If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.*"

In Sonnet 127, Shakespeare stunningly upends traditional aesthetic standards of beauty from white to black, promoting a newfound primacy in black beauty because black is the complexion of the woman he loves: *In the old age black was not counted fair / Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name / But now is black beauty's successive heir...* and so on. He ends with these words demanding respect for his lover's blackness... and let it be *That every tongue says beauty should look so.*

The poet further tells us, in Sonnet 131, that in his aesthetic judgment his mistress' blackness trumps whiteness and that her black beauty exceeds those of any other complexion. He completely breaks with the normative values of his time by asserting that blackness is transcendently preferred over whiteness. Whiteness, which now by comparison to his lover's dark complexion, is inferior, can even be said to carry a taint: *Thy black is fairest in my*

judgment's place. / Then will I swear beauty herself is black / And all they foul that thy complexion lack.

This is radical thinking for its time – and even for our time. There are many of Shakespeare's racial type who are not ready to go as far as he did in aesthetically preferring black beauty to whiteness.

As a result, it is much safer for the white cultural establishment to characterize Shakespeare's views as metaphorical rather than real. It allows critics to deny racial beliefs that they would prefer Shakespeare not have, which permits them to create symbolic projections of their own onto his meaning. It allows these critics to deny that Shakespeare could see *past* racial difference when it is actually they who cannot.

In light of this, we must ask why Shakespeare scholars are so invested in promoting this race-denying perspective. This includes the frequent impulse to summarily deny Othello's blackness as Shakespeare's primary concern as an author, and even question his skin color. Many white critics and scholars have reduced *Othello* to a domestic bedroom tragedy rather than recognize the play as an exposé of the racial intolerance of its time and fear surrounding miscegenation. This is a reflection of the white literary establishment's reluctance to admit that Shakespeare might have had an agenda when it comes to race.

But it is just this kind of denial of Africans in history that perpetuates ignorance and racial misunderstanding.

Refusing to see issues related to blackness in Shakespeare's sonnets and in Othello is as much a habit of white privilege in the academic and cultural sphere as it is in social and political arenas. The failure to see black people or recognize their concerns is a reflection of the racial microaggressions – systemic, every day, unconscious acts of racial bias – that

African Americans endure at the hands of white people and white culture every day.

These gestures of denial in the Academy that are an erasure from the record of a properly historicized black experience is what my scholarship seeks to correct. And this is because it has real world consequences.

Why This Book

When I set out to write the biography of Othello over a decade ago, I thought I would be engaged in producing knowledge that would be welcomed as an antidote to the pattern of excluding the African experience and the African diaspora experience in the master narrative of Western culture. I was hoping that to provide evidence of the ignorance and bias that have denied people of African descent their rightful place in the historiographical canon – a place that has been ignored by most, white European-descended historians like me – would be received well by all. I believed that we were ready as a society to accept our original sin of slavery and work towards racial harmony through a correction of the historical record, which is why I invested my energies in this topic.

Now I see what I have produced in these pages as a salvo in a new culture war that is going to require white people – and that means a critical mass of white people – to get on board to proactively take on the politics of hate that are poisoning our nation in order for race relations to improve. This book is about intellectually understanding how racial identities were constructed by people of European heritage throughout history to disadvantage people who were not. Out of that understanding it is my hope to build empathy for those afflicted by those actions. But now we also need action to grow out of that empathy.

We live in a world of clear and present danger. White Americans cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand any longer and deny our complicity in systemic racism and the politics of hatred and fear that oppresses racial Others. We must aggressively work against these forces to stem the rising tide of social injustice. And we can start by correcting the record.

Read this book to learn some of what is missing from our history as Americans and as citizens of the world. You will be provided with an intensively researched study of Othello's life imagined in its historical context as I strive for nothing less than a re-write of the master narrative that reframes the underreported African presence in European and British history – especially in Shakespeare's London. I critically examine what occurred when black people and white people first interacted at the intersection of continents and cultures in the early modern world as I uncover overlooked antecedents to America's historical struggle with race and racism and the stain of slavery on our national character.

In my reading of the play, the figure of Othello is a vehicle for the transformative role the construction of race plays in the forces of history, which explains why a work of literature written so long ago still speaks to us today. Othello is in our collective conscience, and has been for over 400 years, making Shakespeare's Moor of Venice a signifying figure like no other.

“Othello” as Biography

Although crafted on a matrix of scholarship, *The Biography of Othello* is not a typical history book, it is not just another book about Shakespeare – it is about us; it is about our

shared cultural identity across the spectrum of human difference. Watching or reading *Othello* today is to live 400 years of race relations in Western civilization. Through transforming Othello's fictional story into historically based, cultural biography, this book gives face, voice and agency to the racial Other. The intimate Other. The man inside the construct. For it is through the intimacy of this encounter with Othello as our touchstone that we can also seek to know ourselves – for black people the prefiguration of their own Otherness and for white people the complicity and responsibility of their own privilege based in whiteness.

In this, I include my own privilege, the privilege of my own upbringing, which I have shared with you in *Prologue, Part 2*. Parents who afforded me the social and cultural capital that would allow me to even imagine attempting this major project of taking on Othello's story in the context of an historical approach to the consciousness of race. And for this I am indeed humbly grateful.

In undertaking this work, it is my intention is to take personal action to combat racial injustice – to harness the platform of my privilege in order to add context to combat the centuries long trajectory of European and Euro-American biased practice in the production of knowledge. This because through our complicity in creating and popularizing racist attitudes and behavior, white historians, scholars, academics and public intellectuals have served the purpose of establishing and embedding deeply unjust and morally indefensible discriminatory policies into our nation's educational, social, cultural, scientific, political, legal and criminal justice systems based on unconscionable and arbitrary color-coded preference for one human phenotype over another. The worst offense of this inheritance is to have been complicit in the justification of racialized slavery.

The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life, is not merely a scholarly exegesis of Shakespeare's play. My purpose is to locate the script in the context of its time as a harbinger of racial consciousness and experience of the Other – and then to go on to examine *Othello's* enduring influence. In constructing a biography for the character Othello based on the evidence that Shakespeare presents in his play, I treat Othello as an archetypal figure, a stand-in for black people of his time. I ask that we recognize that Shakespeare's "noble Moor" is a uniquely representative figure of the early modern African diasporic experience with his background both as a prince and as a slave, as well as his extensive travels throughout the black Atlantic world.

It was a time when Europe was on the move and encounters with people of other lands and cultures were underway; it was the time when race understood as color consciousness became a factor. Through the example of Othello's life and experience, the lost history of an era – the history of the African's relationship to early modern Europe and Shakespeare's England – is revealed. Othello is a perfect lens through which to see the process whereby white people confronting racial difference fashioned a hierarchy of being based on color that empowered them.

The purpose of this book, then, is to experience and to examine *Othello* as a medium for understanding race, and to recognize Othello as a signifying figure through whom we can trace the history of the West's encounter with the Other. At the core of this study is the aim to understand the matter of race in the world in which we live today: the hideousness of bigotry and prejudice that because of our history has definitively and irrevocably shaped modern consciousness. *Othello* is our way in to one of the world's greatest least known stories – the honest history of America's racial past. It is a story of persuasive power that contends with

our nation's utmost historical problem and contradiction – slavery. The antecedents of America's race problem begin far beyond our borders and much further back in time than we imagine. Prejudice is not of recent vintage – it is in the American grain.

We will begin our exploration in West Africa when the Portuguese opened the European maritime slave trade in 1443 – one hundred and fifty years before the founding of Jamestown in 1607, and 400 years before the zenith of plantation slavery in the Old South in the nineteenth century. There is no understanding the formation of this nation and its history without first recognizing the centrality of race and slavery in the making of American identity and the deeply rooted antipathy in white Americans' attitudes towards black Americans. With humility and respect, I hope to be an intercessor for the general reader, both black and white, to make the case that history absent this history is no history. The many current claims we hear in the media from pundits and politicians that we are a post-racial society because we not long ago elected a black president are mere deflections to avoid the truth that we are a far more segregated and intolerant society than we would like to believe.

I hope to challenge readers caught between denial and the need to know. We are still suffering the repercussions of America's original sin of racial slavery. And we will continue to suffer its consequences until we acknowledge and address our history head-on. Knowledge frees us. And, although malingering, the cause for racial justice is still America's great cause. Let us take it up with renewed vigor. We can repurpose our priorities to reclaim our true direction, restore the conscience of a nation and heal injustice by activating justice.

History's Dilemma

Of course, just in assuming the task of investigating and explaining the past I am inexorably vulnerable to the contingencies of interpretation. I recognize that historians can never really know what they claim to know – that ultimately what is packaged to us as the truth of history is merely the subjective interpretation of individual historians. Each writing of history is a performance of the past that is unique to the person crafting the narrative. The historian is a cultural person who has – as historian Greg Dening defines it – “an ethnography.” An ethnography that testifies to the consciousness of the individual author and to what he or she brings to the telling of past events.⁷⁴

Simply acknowledging this is the first step in the direction of honest inquiry. I bring a consciously worked at, culturally competent, inclusive perspective to my work on *Othello* that affords me something new and important to say about an ages-old play (a play that has been parsed by scholars, *ad nauseam*, some would say), and about its author, the times in which he lived, and how all this impacts our present world.

I am humbled by my role as conduit of subjectivity through which the materials of history are parsed.

And let me add, my regular use of the term Other naturally leads to the question, Other relative to whom? Well, relative to the collective we, of course - which is white. Writing about race from the perspective of *the collective we of experience* manifestly privileges the white point of view and objectifies the black subject I am trying to rescue from historical obscurity. It is seeing the world through the “white gaze,” which mean’s looking at the world through a white person’s eyes. Ayanna Thompson call this “the right/ white gaze,” which,

taken a step further, “implicitly normalizes,” and even “anti-racializes” the white gaze.”⁷⁵

This is an inherent defect I will work consciously to, if not correct, manage.

The construction of race and racist regimes are a European and American responsibility, so any history of racial encounter and its effect is going to be about what white people did to people who were perceived to be different from them. Reality has not changed since Gunnar Myrdal published his groundbreaking report, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), which famously concluded that the “negro problem” was, in fact, “the white man’s problem.”⁷⁶ In adding why things happened the way they did to the tyranny of what happened, it is my objective to expose the irrationality of oppression. And it is my intent to give voice to the oppressed by locating African-descended people in a narrative from which they have been obliterated. Furthermore, I make a conscious attempt to feature black agency in the stories I relate and in the authorship of historical and critical commentary I include.

Othello as Literary and Historical Icon

Alongside Hamlet, Lear and Macbeth and Romeo, Othello is the most compelling and (in my view) the most heartbreaking of the tragic protagonists wrought by the greatest dramatist and the most influential writer the world has ever produced. Hamlet, Lear and Macbeth are of European royalty: Shakespeare’s Othello is an African-born prince who, in the world of the play, sixteenth century Italy, is far from his West African homeland in distance, time, and experience. Othello is among those black Africans of the early modern world who are displaced by the ill fate of having been captured and infamously sold into slavery. He is a

member of the great African diaspora of the Atlantic world and should be understood in the context of that framework.

Against all odds and expectations, Othello – by virtue of his prodigious talent, his enterprise, his noble character, his cultural capacity and his ability to transcend bondage and racial bigotry – manages as the racial outsider to become a member of the European Renaissance elite (. Othello’s story (prior to his marriage Desdemona just before the opening action of the play) is of the successful assimilation of an upwardly mobile black man into white society. Othello is a striver. He is a black man who manages to penetrate the near highest ranks of white power.

In the scenes of his eponymous drama, Shakespeare presents us with an exotic stranger who fought his way out of slavery eventually to serve the Venetian state as the esteemed commanding General of its armed forces, only to be brought down by the forces of jealousy and racism. *Othello, The Moor of Venice* is an intensely intimate story told by Shakespeare against the backdrop of a world order turned upside down on the brink of transnational modernity.

It is hard not to see in Othello an early modern example of Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers*: “It is not enough to be bright or talented to succeed... Nor is success simply the sum of the decisions and efforts we make on our own behalf. It is, rather, a gift. Outliers are those who have been given opportunities – and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.”⁷⁷

And for all his exoticism, may not Othello, in the end, claim both African and European identities? He is a true a citizen of the world. And, like his poet-creator, Othello belongs to everyone.

The Big Question

Historians ask questions as they investigate their subjects. They like to know, what is the big question? The key historical question being considered?

The big question that guides this project is who is Othello?

Who in Shakespeare's imagination? Who in the underlying source material? Who relative to audiences and readers? Who based on historical possibilities?

I am definitely on rocky territory as an historian when I ask, who *might* he have been. But that is my point. I have constructed a biography of Othello as a signifying figure. I have imagined him as an emblematic yet real man of the African diaspora in early modern Europe. In doing so, I also ask the following questions.

Who is Othello in modern culture?

Who is Othello to the reader and theatergoer?

What place does he occupy in the collective imagination?

What did (and does) he symbolize?

Why did Shakespeare tell his story?

And I also concern myself with topic historians love to investigate: change over time. So...

How did Othello change over time?

This too will be addressed.

But in truth, perhaps, the really big question is,

Why should we care?

What is Othello to Us that We Should Concern Ourselves with Him?

The answer to why we should care about Othello permeates every aspect of this project. I use history as an opportunity to interrogate the present: Othello as a medium to interrogate the subject of race and race relations in our contemporary world.

April 10, 2014, President Barack Obama spoke at the Civil Rights Summit in Austin, Texas in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which ended legal racial segregation in the nation's public spaces. He cited his very appearance at the podium as America's first black president as a testament to the progress made since President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in the presence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

But what was reported, notably by Charles M. Blow in *The New York Times* the day after, was the sobering fact that we are more segregated as a society than ever: "About 40 percent of white Americans and about 25 percent of nonwhite Americans are surrounded exclusively by friends of their own race." And furthermore: "Students are more racially segregated in schools today than they were in the late 1960s and prior to the enforcement of court-ordered desegregation in school districts across the country." With the astonishing finding that "New York has the most segregated schools in the country."

This is why we should care.

It has been empirically demonstrated that there are positive consequences of encountering the Other as neighbor. Prejudice diminishes, as the hitherto "unseen and unknown" stranger becomes known. Empathy and socialization set in. As reported in London's *The Independent* in March 2014 (and picked up soon after by Charles Blow in *The*

New York Times), Psychology Professor Miles Hewstone of Oxford University led an international study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* with these conclusive results: “We have shown that positive contact between people belonging to different ethnic groups leads to more tolerant societies overall.” In *The Independent*, Steve Connor states:

People who live in ethnically diverse streets are less racially prejudiced than individuals living in highly segregated areas and their increased tolerance is due directly to the experience of a more integrated society. Even when white people have little interaction with other groups living in the same ethnically diverse community, they feel more tolerant towards them purely because they witness positive interactions between different racial groups.⁷⁸

Prof. Hewstone and his team call this effect “passive tolerance.” He describes it this way:

If two white people with identical views went to live in different postcodes for a year, the person in the neighborhood with more mixing between ethnic groups would likely leave more tolerant. We would see this effect even if they never personally spoke to people from other ethnicities. The size of this ‘passive tolerance’ effect on people's prejudice is of the same order as the effect of passive smoking on lung cancer risk.⁷⁹

“We need to see people other than ourselves in order to empathize,” is clearly the message of this study, cautions Blow. “If we don’t live around others we do ourselves and our society damage because our ability to relate becomes impaired. It’s easy to demonize, or simply dismiss, people you don’t know or see. It’s in this context that we can keep having inane conversations about the ‘habits’ and ‘culture’ of the poor and ‘inner city’ citizens,” he adds, leaving us to ponder our fate as a culture: “It’s nearly impossible to commiserate with the unseen and unknown.”⁸⁰ Tragically, segregation in our communities and major cities has been fueled by a system of legal and systematic social engineering that institutionalized racism through white only housing dictums in even our most liberal states to dire continuing effect.

As we have seen in *Prologue, Part 2*, an encounter with the Other through literature renders the unknown knowable in the realm of the imagination. The sometimes unsympathetically considered (or simply unconsidered) black man was both revealed and made known by Shakespeare in the figure of Othello. How can we ever question again whether Othello matters? He stands in for the all too rare true to life empathic encounter with the “unseen and unknown” Other. Because of the effect of the power of the brand which has become Shakespeare, Othello may still be the focus of the first stirrings of empathy many white Americans feel for a person of color.

The ratio of the number of black people to the native English population may have been small in Shakespeare’s day, but the possibility of encounter in the City of London was potentially greater than today even though the current ratios are much higher in today’s cities and communities. Why? Because Shakespeare’s London was not segregated by neighborhood.

In *The Biography of Othello*, I imagine Othello’s life in its historical context. *Othello*, in my reading of the play, is a vector for the transformative role the construction of race plays in the forces of history. This is why a work of literature written so long ago still speaks to us today.

Othello: America's Play

One of the most grotesque inconsistencies in the development of the Americas was the idea that a utopian enterprise could be founded on the backs of slaves.

– Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion*⁸¹

Othello has been called by some Shakespeare's "American play" because it is about race. The objective of this book is to ask what the story of *Othello* can tell us about our history of race and how we can understand our racial divisions by examining our past with the hope that this will help us to make positive change. Seen through Shakespeare's lens *Othello* is a vector for the transformative role the construction of race plays in the forces of history. This is why this work of literature written so long ago still speaks to us today. We must acknowledge that America is a nation at odds with itself when black America exists within the context of its irrefutable struggle to have its presence consented to by white America. Race is an embedded and volatile fault-line in our culture. Seepage from its fissure is white racism. It exists in our politics. We enact white supremacist policy without overtly saying so when the real purpose is to diminish the proportion of votes cast by African Americans

And that means dismantling color as the arbiter of opportunity to access American democracy.

As Toni Morrison observes: "Color is a substitute for racism." The "privileges to certain kinds of color...are social constructs; these are not inventions of science." Rather they are standards conceived by the people they most prefer. Simply acquiescing to white privilege by ignoring its effects on the people it excludes and disadvantages means that everyone who benefits from the privileges of whiteness is contributing to the perpetuation of racism. It is

just that simple.

The reasons that human beings construct arbitrary differences are self-serving, offers Morrison: “Some profitable, some just personal.” Privilege based on color requires imaging a certain comparative condition: It presupposes “thinking of how can you feel really, really good about yourself if there is nothing to be othered, if you can’t separate yourself from something that you are convinced is lower than yourself.”⁸² This notion of what we call “Othering” is to know the self in opposition to that which I am not and (all too often) demonizing one’s opposite. Othering is role playing that serves the agenda of the subjugator, for it creates a rationale for assigning inferiority and disrespect to a group based on an unempirical pecking order of human phenotypical, cultural, ethnic and/or religious difference that power dictates.⁸³ As pseudo-science, it is half-backed. As social policy, it is a weak and pathetic position from which to build one’s identity. But for the dominant culture, white culture, to prosper at the expense of marginalized “Others”, especially black Others, is both our history and our scourge.

In the light of the deaths of countless black people, who it has been exposed through the democratization of the media are losing lives to structural racism, we can no longer ignore the truth: What makes America great was born of everything that made it unjust.

As Ta-Nehesi Coates writes to his son in his epistolary essay, *Between the World and Me* (2015): “There is no them without you, and without the right to break you they must necessarily fall from the mountain, lose their divinity and tumble out of the Dream...” Without the black other to oppress, those privileged enough to participate in the American dream, which by definition is only available to white America because it does not exist without the sacrifice of black bodies, “would have to determine how to build their suburbs on

something other than human bones, how to angle their jails toward something other than a human stockyard, how to erect a democracy independent of cannibalism.”⁸⁴ If we are serious about equality and equal opportunity in America we must stop this cycle and “fix” the disparity of white privilege that is, “ill-gotten and selective.”⁸⁵ There is no American Dream – the myth of the self-made American – if only white people can choose whom they want to be.

In order to effect necessary change in the social order of opportunity, those of us possessed of white privilege must teach ourselves to become more sensitive to the gradations of our advantage because it is hard to see past and through the distancing that by definition privilege creates. White privilege speaks to the corollary that often goes unaddressed in black/white relations: *What puts you at a disadvantage puts me at an advantage.* And vice versa. We can start by at least recognizing this dialectic as a problem and dig at our own prejudices and the effects of implicit bias towards black people. White America should confront unexamined feelings of entitlement. We must figure out how to deal with the inevitably push and pull that results when we admit that some of us must experience a degree of loss in our privileged status so that everyone can be equal. Paraphrasing President Obama, *my liberty cannot depend on a denial of yours if America is to live up to the promise of its foundational creed.*⁸⁶

Any contemporary examination of white privilege needs to expose the results of its concrete application in discriminatory social policy to show how making whiteness the condition of opportunity has created a permanent African American underclass. The truly shocking statistic Coates alerts us to in his article is this: “Black families, regardless of income, are significantly less wealthy than white families. The Pew Research Center

estimates that white households are worth roughly 20 times as much as black households.”⁸⁷

Writing in *The New York Times* on white privilege, Parul Sehgal provides some historical context on how we should understand the disparities of opportunity in American culture based on color and inequality is more than just economic. “In the 1930s, Sehgal tells us, “W.E.B. Du Bois had an insight that privilege isn’t only about having money — it’s a state of being. He noted a ‘psychological wage’ of whiteness: Poor whites felt that they outranked poor blacks; they could at least vote and access public schools and parks.”⁸⁸

Here we have a clear example of a situation where even if a white person does not have much that individual can at least take comfort in knowing that the condition of whiteness confers greater rights to those who possess it than any black person could ever hope for. White privilege begins as a mindset with invidious roots. As playwright August Wilson, who spent his career chronicling the black experience in America, so presciently notes, this relationship between color and privilege carries with it the taint of America’s original sin: “The term black or African American not only denotes race; it denotes condition and carries with it the vestige of slavery and the social segregation and abuse of opportunity so vivid in our memory.”⁸⁹

Going forward, it is critical that we acknowledge that white privilege is the vestigial limb of its more virulent corpus, white supremacy. Which, with its race hatred and racist violence at its core, its brutality and inhumanity, lives catastrophically among us. To suppose otherwise is magical thinking, deluding ourselves that we live in the image of what we think this nation stands for. The tragic murder of nine targeted black worshippers at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina, June 17, 2015, were designed by its perpetrator (and set forth in an online white supremacist diatribe) to start a

self-described “race war” to defend white privilege.⁹⁰ We can directly relate the martyrdom of the “Emanuel Nine” to one confessed white supremacist’s vicious and twisted impulse to promote his own value by murdering black Americans at prayer as an assertion of white privilege.

Make no mistake Dylan Roof’s hateful line of thinking comes from a carefully constructed ideology of self-justification that is tied to America’s heritage as a slave society. A slave society that was the economic underpinning of the democracy so enjoyed by the people of white privilege. “To celebrate freedom and democracy while forgetting America’s origins in a slavery economy is patriotism à la carte,” is a Ta Nehesi Coates truism that deserves serious attention.⁹¹

Roof’s racism is sourced in a historical belief system. As Andrea Mitchell noted of the then twenty-one-year-old on her television news show, “He was not born hating black people.”⁹² No, it was something he learned. He learned it in the zeitgeist of hate.

The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life treats Shakespeare’s Othello as an intercessor in a dialogue between oppositional attitudes expressed towards the racial Other by the dominant culture at the cusp of modernity. The story of Othello mirrors the history of the construction of race in Western consciousness. The manner in which Shakespeare’s “noble Moor” has been received in intellectual and populist circles and on the British and American stage tracks the development of the black image in the white mind and the evolution of racist thought. It parallels the development of institutionalized racist social policy, racialist ideology and pseudo-science.

Othello’s trajectory is an American story because race occupies a singular significance in our history and because race is still a barrier to equal opportunity and national unity.

America's "race problem" has been with us from our founding. America – a land of paradox where both slavery and a devotion to the principles of individual freedom were equally at its existential core – is still refining its creed and struggling to enact its purpose.

As President Barack Obama observed on the occasion of his second inauguration: "Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free. We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together." It is this repurposing of the restrictions on who participated in our early democracy – white, male, landowners – to expand the principles of liberty for all that makes us great as a nation.

"Today we continue a never-ending journey," Obama continued, "to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they have never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth." Fine words from the nation's first black president. So difficult to achieve.

Couched in the legacy of captivity, oppression, and inhuman bondage, race in America is still a fulcrum for guilt and blame. In 2008, we as a people congratulated ourselves on the election of a black American to the highest office in the land. It represented a huge milestone. But this country has never been good with the follow up when it comes to progressive racial landmarks. Think of the failure of post-Civil War Reconstruction, the subsequent enactment of separate but equal Jim Crow laws in the South and redlining, the discriminatory housing policies that used race and ethnicity to determine mortgage eligibility in the North. All of which persisted deep into our present times.

Now we can see that, sadly, the election of our first black president has been used by

his political opponents on the right to stir up grievances and foment racial animosity, rather than resolve our differences. The act of selection by majority election of Barack Obama and all he stands for was so anathema to the far-right that they have worked assiduously to deny this president his legitimacy. They have put their own dystopian figurehead in office as president to deny Obama a legacy, to reverse anything and everything that made his presidency meaningful. Witness the obsession with “repealing and replacing” Obamacare. These forces of right-wing extremism have elected the father of “birtherism” to succeed him. From the conflation of policy attacks with personal attacks, Trump has done all in his power to undermine Barack Obama’s legitimacy and effectiveness as president in order to provide a cautionary tale to black aspiration.

Kim F. Hall, in her very important, insightful article, “Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender,” points out that the discussion of race in *Othello*, or, in fact, any Renaissance drama, must “not focus on minoritized people” as objects for study. Raising the matter of race is not enough. If issues of power are not engaged, argues Hall, then “[s]uch an approach may actually collude in racial inequality” because all you have done is isolate and problematize the black person as “other” Hall underscores this point by quoting Peggy MacIntosh’s following observation: “I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught *not* to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege.” Because “Other” is defined in reference to whiteness, white privilege must be a part of the discourse around race.⁹³

This could not be more important to interpreting Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Observe how the issue of power can alter the discourse. Othello can either be viewed as a benighted victim of self-doubt, a jealous husband gulled by his own credulity (as he often is) or as a righteous

and trusting sacrifice to the preserve of white male privilege. The events of the play stay the same, but the stakes that inform the action within which Othello is brutally manipulated are strikingly different. Desdemona, who consciously challenges white male patriarchy is a martyr or a victim.

Othello, a Signifying Life

From its inception in the Jacobean theater, every *consequent* reading or performance of *Othello* has been a reenactment of each individual's encounter with the Other. As a reflection on how the West confronts human diversity with not only anxiety and fear but also, yes, with attraction and desire, this book is about how Othello is an indispensable key to understanding our shared humanity in spite of our differences.

The Biography of Othello treats Shakespeare's play about a black hero as a vehicle to interrogate the nature of race and its social construction in the context of an early modern European consciousness of racial difference that could structure an emerging economic order in Capitalism based upon the exploitation of black bodies. As a reflection of the spirit of the age in each successive age, audience and reader response to *Othello* chronicles the politics of racial identity and representation and the state of race relations as they have changed over time. This is why a play written so long ago in the past still speaks to us today. We are still living the aftermath of slavery and its racist regimes.

In *The Biography of Othello*, I look at the play from its origins in Shakespeare's lived experience and in the context of his imaginary. I show how *Othello* has roots in Shakespeare's awareness of African history and Africa's encounter with Europe and his own very real encounters with black people living in England. I explore how the character Othello has

emerged as a social and cultural signifier: from character to icon, to political and cultural symbol from Shakespeare's time to the present. My concern is with history's claims to truth, addressed from the relationship between what happened and what might have happened. And I interrogate the implications of historical bias.

The Biography of Othello takes a trajectory that begins with the first European expansion into West Africa - to the enslavement of Africans to supply labor for colonial economies - to a new American nation that could profess that all men are created equal, while enshrining color-code slavery in its Constitution. Through the arc of the narrative we move to Abolition – to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (fig. 169) **Error! Reference source not found.**– to Jim Crow – through the Civil Rights Movement and, finally, to the election of a black American president (Obama as Othello?). As a forum for ideas, this book project is a synthetic work of cultural and social history (the construction of race, the history of difference, and the history of consciousness) in a global context that reinserts reflexively overlooked aspects of the African and African diaspora experience into the grand schema of Western Civilization and world history.

Othello is featured in this project as our guide to understanding the history of European and Anglo-American attitudes towards race as registered both within the individual and in society, allowing us to trace over time the impact these attitudes have in the world. Throughout history *Othello* has demonstrated its capacity to be a medium through which we interrogate ourselves as we confront our ability to access our humanity in relationship to the Other. For in *Othello* we learn what it is to Other and to be Othered.

It was radical indeed for Shakespeare to create a tragic hero in the Western tradition who is African. In his *Poetics*, the earliest known treatise on dramatic theory (a text which

Shakespeare and his poet peers were held accountable to), Aristotle stipulates that the hero of a tragedy must be someone audiences will feel pity for and whose fate they will fear for because they care for him. But by dint of circumstance the hero cannot be an ordinary man. He must be a man of noble birth with the quality of greatness. This Aristotelian ideal is not the typical image of the black man in the early modern world. But Shakespeare gives Othello royal birth, a royal African birth, and vests him with uncommon humanity; he is a public figure both to be admired and warmed to as a relatable human being. This makes an extraordinary statement about the measure of commonality when under the rules of Shakespeare's culture, it is indeed remarkable that Othello exists at all.

To tell Othello's story both on and off the stage, is to consider the contested meanings of race, class, gender, power, masculinity, sexuality, betrayal and honor. Part saga, part discourse, part travelogue, all radical history, in this book I lead the reader on a literal journey of discovery that disrupts all previous preconceptions of historical understanding about race. It is an encounter that includes Shakespeare's newfound black London neighbors and the "Dark Lady of the Sonnets."

We will trace with the very real and diverse topographies of the early modern Black Atlantic world, that inspired the poet. Locations which center and inform *Othello* from its origins in Shakespeare's lived experience and the recesses of his imagination.

You will learn that over the 500-year history of the Atlantic slave trade how the dynamic and complex story of the African diaspora impacted and wrote the history of modernity. It is a narrative that includes centuries of persecution and enduring struggle, acts of heroisms and personal triumphs in the face of unspeakable atrocities, depredations, demonization and marginalization. The African diaspora is tied together by its collective story

of suffering and spirit, strength and ingenuity, which resides in the mind and in the heart of a people forcibly displaced and enslaved. It is a story inextricably tied to a shared identity constructed from commonality and group solidarity in the consciousness of an African origin that reifies its members. Survival is the story: The people who survived, its embodiment.

You will learn about the first time the West became fearful of its encounter with Islam. A complex and dynamic relationship between two dominant cultures, the followers of Islam brought art, science, architecture and knowledge to Christendom, as well as centuries of conflict. Although the Age of European Expansion marked the end to Islam's 800-year rule over the Iberian Peninsula, and Islamic culture waned in influence in Europe, the threat of Islamic power did not. With the rise of the Turks and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the war between Islam and the West for sovereignty was as much a feature of the ensuing sixteenth century as it is of the late twentieth and twenty-first century.

Suleiman I, known as "the Magnificent," (see fig. 97, fig. 98) **Error! Reference source not found.** was a famous ruler of the early modern period, presiding over the apex of the Ottoman Empire's military, political and economic might. Othello, sent in Shakespeare's play by the Republic of Venice to Cyprus to do battle with the Turks, is an instrument in this epic clash of civilizations – a struggle that has endured ever since.

You are there with me as I search for knowledge and meaning while tracking Othello through interpretive and historical traditions that lead us to our present-day world of unresolved racial angst. Over time Othello's narrative in the zeitgeist serves as a barometer for tracking racialism – the belief in the existence and saliency of racial difference. Through *Othello*'s history on the stage and in recorded critical response to the text, we can map social

attitudes towards blackness over the expanse of years Shakespeare has influenced world culture.

Othello, as a reflection of the spirit of the age in which it was written, chronicles the politics of identity and representation in an increasingly race-inflected world. In *Othello* Shakespeare problematizes the nature of race and its social construction in the context of an early modern European consciousness that could, yes, stomach chattel slavery for Africans as a natural condition, but could also tolerate elevating the status of an exceptional black man like Othello to the ranks of white power and privilege when it served society's purpose.

Since that time, the character Othello has served as a tracking reflection of the dominant European and Anglo-America attitudes towards tolerating the presence of an elite African – especially with respect to interracial relationships – as attitudes changed. “For the first 200 years of *Othello*'s performance history in England, the character Othello – invariably played by white actors – was depicted with dark makeup.”

But by 1820, English actor Edmund Kean had normalized a lighter-complexioned “tawny” Moor... In 1826 Edwin Forrest became the first famous American-born Othello, debuting a lighter-featured version of the character at the age of 20 (his final performance in the role was in 1872, the year he died).⁹⁴

This became known as the “bronze age of *Othello*.” Othello was still being depicted on the stage as an ethnic “Other,” but one quite distinct from African Americans.⁹⁵

Thus, Othello was literally whitened on English and American stages – as actors applied lighter and lighter greasepaint as a gesture of racial purification. Every time Othello's color changed on stage, it was because the culture's way of looking at him changed.” It was not until the twentieth century before Othello was eventually restored to blackness.

[I]n an increasingly race-obsessed 19th-century America that would go to war over slavery, develop a more coherent ideology of white supremacy, and invent blackface minstrel performance, *Othello* provided a unique opportunity to define American whiteness. What troubled many white people, in short, was that the revered Bard himself had created a noble character who was also black. To acknowledge *Othello* as black was to taint Shakespeare's greatness, and to admit the possibility that African Americans could also possess the author's positive characteristics.⁹⁶

The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was one prominent opinion-maker for whom such a noble character could not possibly be black. The prevailing attitudes of racial prejudice would not allow for this seeming anomaly. Others "reconciled *Othello*'s blackness by seeing it as a flaw of the play or as a cautionary tale about race mixing."⁹⁷

A pattern of transformation of this kind leaves its residue in the collective memory with each encounter. Thus, every reading or performance of *Othello* is a reenactment of all past engagements with the text. Imagine a layering process that has embedded a palimpsest of meaning in the pages of Shakespeare's playscript. Each imbrication has had a hand in shaping the moment of our present racial consciousness. This is why a 400-year old literary work can speak so powerfully to us today.

The World's First Black Man

You will discover that the story of *Othello* as I tell it represents *Othello* not only as he appears in the story Shakespeare's gives us as a fictional character but as someone who might actually have lived. My strategy is to reimagine *Othello* as an allegorical figure through a historical lens. In the parlance of theater practice, *to mine the play's text* for embedded clues regarding *Othello's given circumstances* – his potential lived experience. I will deconstruct

the poet's imagination, in order to reconstruct for you events of the past and the culture of the past in new and surprising ways.

So, we will look at *Othello*, from its origins in Shakespeare's lived experience of race, class and gender and the social and cultural and intellectual forces that influenced him – *Othello* did not materialize out of thin air. Journeying is the trope that propels the story of *Othello* from its roots in African history and Africa's encounter with Europe to the various manifestations of Othello as character, icon, and political and cultural symbol, from the age of Shakespeare to the present. My objective in taking cues from an Elizabethan poet's imagination and to imaginatively augment Shakespeare's plot progression – taking Othello from a royal West African boyhood – to capture “by the insolent foe” – to sale as a commodity of human flesh – to coerced passage on a Portuguese slave ship – to bondage in the Iberian world – to personal redemption as Christian convert in Rome – to freedom as a soldier of fortune – to service as General of the Venetian forces – to husband to Desdemona – and, finally, to Cyprus, as military envoy for the city-state of Venice – is simply to actualize a potential to understand what might have been.⁹⁸ Through *Othello* we can access the historical basis for the life of an African prince disordered by the confluence of encounter between Europe and non-European peoples – a condition characteristic of his time.

Today *Othello* stands as a racial signifier with a history like no other. Shakespeare and *Othello* occupy that liminal space we refer to as common knowledge. Each of us knows *Othello* – or at least we know *of* *Othello*. You do not have to be educated to know *Othello*, or even literate to know *Othello*. We know him either through a direct encounter with Shakespeare's text or simply as an indexical sign that touches all our lives. Only Shakespeare, the greatest playwright of all time, has the power to confer immortal fame on tragic heroes of

the drama with the touch of a pen – and through words that many may never even personally hear or read.

As a member of the pantheon that includes Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth, Othello is a figure indelibly woven into the warp and weft of our social fabric as a cultural referent. And Shakespeare's noble Moor is notable for being the first individual of African origin to fully live in the collective conscience. Time out of mind, from the very first performance of the play, readers and playgoers have used Othello to process their feelings and make meaning of race. Othello is the proto-African onto whom people who benefit from white privilege have long projected their feelings about racial others.

No other figure, neither real or imagined, can rival Othello's breadth as a cultural signifier or touch his illustrative legacy when it comes to tracking the historical currents of racial identity and difference from England, to Africa, and across Europe, to America. This is because the plays of Shakespeare are ubiquitously and universally available – and accessed in many languages. It is also because we have a record of how the character Othello has been represented by actors on the world stage as a performance of race.

In *The Biography of Othello*, I demonstrate that Shakespeare, in a gesture of unprecedented tolerance for his time, used his play about an interracial marriage to make a case for the need for racial understanding. What could be more meaningful in today's world beset as we are with so many crises of racial injustice and the unresolved currents of strife and mistrust that sour the civics of current race relations?

Othello exerts an almost gravitational pull on us. He is the first person of African origin to penetrate and live in the collective conscience. That is the power of the reach of

Shakespeare's drama and the even greater power of Othello on the stage. It is because of this that I dare to call Othello the world's first black man.

Certainly, there are those, among them many black people, who will protest I am unduly privileging Shakespeare – a Dead White Male author, after all, by crediting him with the origins of the world's first black man. But in making this assertion I am identifying Othello as the uniquely important symbol he represents in Western thought with his potent and universally understood as a set of cultural referents. In so doing it is not my intention to deny agency to black people – in fact, it is my purpose in this study to showcase the individual lives of Africans and people of African descent whenever I can to rectify their absence from the master narrative of history as it has traditionally been written.

As for Shakespeare, he is not just any DWM: he is Shakespeare-as-literary-institution – one of the most influential brands in global culture. That Shakespeare, an extraordinary aesthetic visionary capable of seeing beyond standard ways of thinking, elevated a black man to the status of tragic hero in one of his dramas and chose to introduce racism as the theme of a tragedy was a singular act of profound significance in the history of racial understanding and how we construct race. No, Shakespeare is not the voice of the black experience, but under the circumstance of his time where the black man is denied a voice, he insures that he will have one. He is the literary architect who believed that a black man should have a voice after all.

When you have been denied voice by an oppressive system, you will turn to someone who understood the voice of the human condition – and that is Shakespeare. The power of representation is the very nature of theater, and Shakespeare is beyond measure in providing us with a counterfeit reality that is true to our experience. Why should we expect anything

different with his treatment of Othello? The way we receive information and value one person or one culture over another certainly impacts our collective knowing. And nothing rivals the power of brand Shakespeare to confer value.

No one culture or race should be privileged over another. Great writers take from their predecessors. And I would argue that Shakespeare belongs to all of us, he has become too iconic to be the property of any one race or culture.

Poet Maya Angelou confides in us, “Shakespeare is a black woman.”⁹⁹

The sage African American historian and philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois – grandson of Othello Burghardt – asserts his right to claim Shakespeare as his own when at the turn of twentieth century he defiantly announces to Jim Crow America: “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not.”¹⁰⁰

In *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (1999), Anthony Appiah references Du Bois’ now famous quote when he expresses concern that our educational system, in an attempt at cultural relevancy, segregates content in the classroom in a way that wreaks havoc for all.

Because Homer and Shakespeare are products of Western culture they are awarded to white children who have never studied them, never heard their names. And in this generous spirit the fact is forgotten that cultural geneticism deprives white people of jazz and black people of Shakespeare. This is a bad deal...¹⁰¹

Of course, the right way to contend with the competition between Shakespeare and other valued texts is simply not to consign Shakespeare to solely a textual study. Courses in theater and drama as an arts practice should be part of every young person’s education, along with the other arts. If the arts were valued as part of the standard curriculum, then teachers and students would not be faced with such draconian choices. In Shakespeare’s day he was

called a “scenic poet;” his plays should be studied *en scène*.

When I was dean of the CalArts Theater School, I recruited the Pulitzer-prize winning, African American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks to head our new MFA writing program. As a condition, she required that we establish in the Theater School a course called – “Shakespeare Read-through.” Suzan-Lori wanted her students to encounter Shakespeare because, as she puts it:

Shakespeare's plays have soul, with the mind and heart in perfect balance. That's what I love about his work, and that's what I seek to emulate. Those are the footsteps that I'm working to follow in.¹⁰²

But she also wanted her students, as she notes, “freed from having to regurgitate conventional thought” about Shakespeare’s plays.

Suzan-Lori recognized that often what burdens Shakespeare for students who come at his plays from diverse backgrounds is the culture of literary criticism that privileges the expert’s – the white expert’s – interpretation over the reader’s own relationship to the work that’s on the page. As we have seen it is the critical process itself, with its own rarified language and culturally imposed chauvinisms that rather than elucidate the work, can create an impenetrable barrier formed by those who would tell us what we are supposed to *correctly* understand from a play of Shakespeare’s.

Suzan-Lori’s purpose in banishing the critics was to banish the prejudice and bias in the discourse around Shakespeare plays, especially the misrepresentation of race. So “Shakespeare Read-through” was a class where the critics were pointedly not to be consulted in order to liberate the “soul” of the plays for the students to discover for themselves and find themselves within – no matter their color.

When I think of the audience for this biography of Othello, I always have in mind the

young black actors I have encountered in the course of my career as a producer and as an educator who to this day see playing Othello as the epitome of their career aspirations. They deserve to know the play that Shakespeare wrote is indeed inclusive of their culture and the history of their people.

But even with the growing preponderance of evidence that establishes the physical presence of black people in Tudor and Stuart London, the news has not uniformly trickled down even to theater people. Consider how the celebrated director Peter Sellars has grappled with this issue even as he directed *an* imaginative adaptation of the Shakespeare play, called *Desdemona*, written by Toni Morrison, and first produced in 2011. The director had a “long debate with Morrison about the contemporary worth of the play itself.” As a reporter interviewing Sellars for *The Guardian* wrote in 2015, “Morrison had thought *Othello* still a useful play; Sellars for many years had not been convinced.” In Sellars’ own words: “I was annoyed at this play [Othello], and really felt Shakespeare didn’t know any black people, and that showed.”

How Peter Sellars response to the play have changed if he knew the true history of black people in early modern England, we can only imagine.

That even Peter Sellars can be misled about the presence/absence of black people in Shakespeare’s world, and how they influenced him, shows what happens when advances in scholarship do not penetrate the public awareness. This failure in not knowing the facts is not Sellars’ fault. It is the collective resistance to changing received information and embracing the true historical record that has failed Peter Sellars.

This absence of black people in the record has failed all of us.

As a shining star in Shakespeare’s literary firmament, for many people of African

descent I know or have researched, Othello is a source of pride. His extraordinary record of achievement is a great success story, especially of its time. That general Othello is then viciously brought down by racist spite is a tragedy, but not a surprise. Othello is a powerful surrogate for the crushed ambitions of every black man who has dared to challenge the tyranny of an intrinsically racist social system (no matter how veiled) and been denied. A man of astonishing accomplishment Othello models the aspirational African in an inimical culture, prefiguring all who have struggled to advance their position against the odds in a white establishment world.

For people of all colors, Othello's enduring presence in the world has been of such symbolic consequence that he mediates our communal understanding of the shared burden of race. A mere literary figure and not a real person, yet from his inception Othello has served as the first fully dimensioned, humanely wrought, black man to positively impact black and white relations.

NOTES

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⁶³ August Wilson, “The Ground on Which I Stand,” *Callaloo* 20, no. 3 (March 1, 1998): 493–503, doi:10.1353/cal.1998.0096.

⁶⁴ Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, 22; Bate, *Soul of The Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare* (New York: Random House, 2009), 82.

⁶⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc, 2015), 68.

⁶⁶ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 2:288.

⁶⁷ See London Archives, <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/visitor-information/Documents/21-black-caribbean-community-archives.pdf>. Pioneers in this project are Marika Sherwood and Dr. Imtiaz Habib, who have published results from this collective research project in *Black Lives in the English Archives: Imprints of the Invisible* (2008). Also, of note for historicizing this study of the parish records is Dr. Miranda Kaufmann's doctoral dissertation on 'Africans in Britain, 1500-1640,' completed in the history department, Christ Church, Oxford, in 2011.

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⁸⁶ “My liberty depends on you being free too,” said President Obama in his eulogy of Rev. Clementa Pinckney, delivered June 26, 2015, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Charleston, South Carolina. Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney,” *Whitehouse.Gov*, June 26, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/26/remarks-president-eulogy-honorable-reverend-clementa-pinckney>.

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PROLOGUES AND INTRODUCTION: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. St. Mark's Square with Doge's Palace and Lion of Saint Mark in Venice, n/d. Photo by Sheraton Hotels.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 2. Attributed to John Taylor, *Shakespeare* (Chandos Portrait), c. 1600-1610. Oil on canvas, feigned oval. Given by Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of Ellesmere, 1856. National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 3. Attributed to William Hogarth, *Othello's Defense*, 18th Century. Worthington Galleries. The painting depicts a scene where Desdemona and Othello plead before the Doge – Act 1, Scene 3. Accessed: <https://worthingtongalleries.com/shop/19th-century-oil-painting-entitled-othellos-defense-after-to-jack-leigh-wardleworth/#tab-description>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 4. Unknown Artist, *Portrait of Alessandro de Medici* (1510-1537), first Duke of Florence, n/d. Source: <http://www.taneter.org/alessandro.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 5. Ira Aldridge as Othello in England, 1833. Public domain.

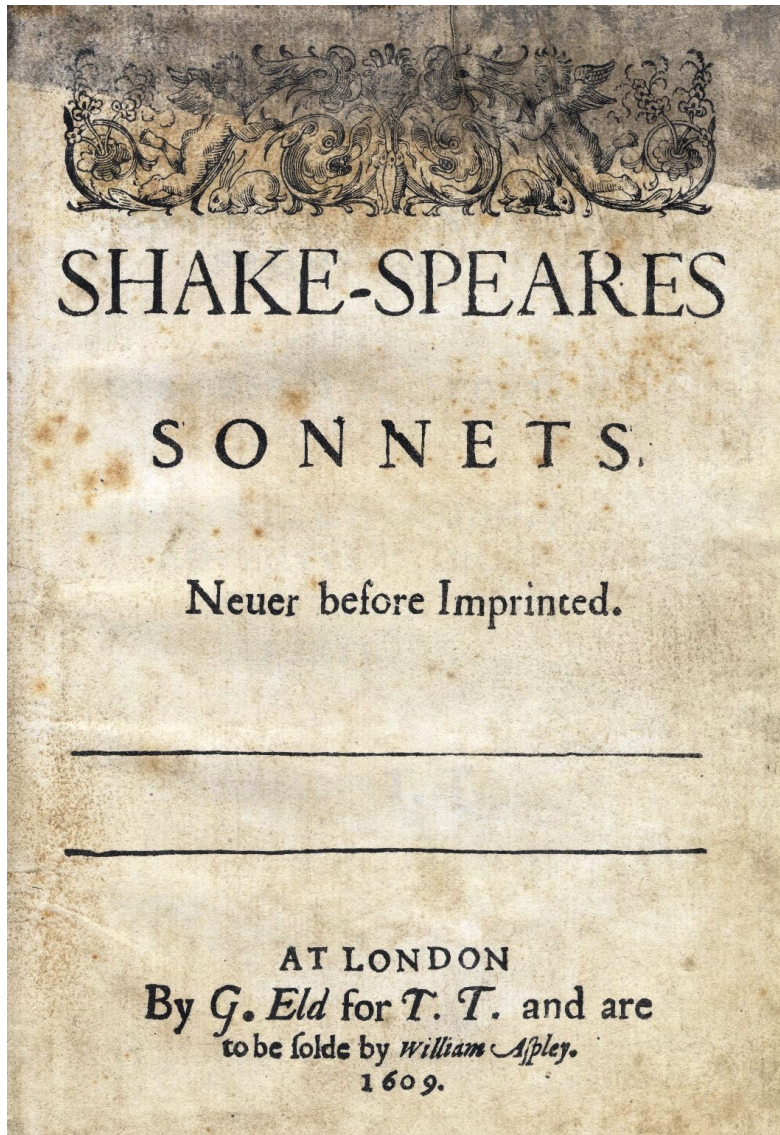


Figure 6. Title page of Shakespeare's Sonnets (1609). Shake-Speare's Sonnets, Quarto published by Thomas Thorpe, London, 1609. Folger Shakespeare Library.

130
MY Mistres eyes are nothing like the Sunne,
Currall is farre more red, then her lips red,
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:
If haire be wiers, black wiers grow on her head:
I haue seene Roses damaskt, red and white,
But no such Roses see I in her cheekes,
And in some perfumes is there more delight,
Then in the breath that from my Mistres reekes.
I loue to heare her speake, yet well I know,
That Musicke hath a farre more pleasing sound:
I graunt I neuer saw a goddesse goe,
My Mistres when shee walkes treads on the ground.
And yet by heauen I thinke my loue as rare,
As any she bcli'd with false compare.

Figure 7. Sonnet 130 in the 1609 Quarto of Shakespeare's sonnets. Folger Shakespeare Library.

**PART ONE: WRITING HISTORY and “RIGHTING”
HISTORY**

**CHAPTER ONE
HISTORY’S NATURE**

**CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL PRACTICE**

**Some Views on the History and Historiography of the Presence of Africans
in Antiquity, Medieval, and Early Modern Europe and Britain**

**CHAPTER THREE
BIOGRAPHY**

Some Exemplary Lives

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY'S NATURE

The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible... Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars.

– Aristotle, *The Poetics* (c. 335 BCE)¹⁰³

The historian's craft (and, in a different way, the poet's) involves something that is part of everyone's life: untangling the strands of the true, the false, and the fictional which are the substance of our being in the world.

– Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces* (2012)¹⁰⁴

The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarity known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. This claim is especially relevant to the performances that flourish within the geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world.

– Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (1996)¹⁰⁵

The discursive field of postcolonial theory, from Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) onwards, has often questioned the Eurocentric premises of "discovering" lands, people, and valuable commodities—a process that is recounted in earliest travel narratives through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

– Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh, eds. *Travel Knowledge* (2001)¹⁰⁶

Othello as Historical Proxy

Othello's presence in the early modern black Atlantic world exhorts a potent mnemonic link. Peel the onion and Othello's life experience overlaps the individual achievements of Africans in the ambit of early modern Europe and in interactions on their native turf with European voyagers. The evidence supports the conclusion that like Othello there were other exceptional Africans of the diaspora who were free cultural players in the societies of the enslavers and soon to be enslavers. And some of these Africans of status were, uncomfortably, enslavers themselves. We will not shy away from this disquieting reality. Certainly, there were more black people with agency and elite social standing than is generally thought. Consider Bemoim, the fifteenth century Wolof prince who converted from Islam and was baptized in Lisbon in the presence of his godparents the king and queen of Portugal.¹⁰⁷ A story we will explore together later in this chapter.

Othello is a traveler – a wanderer. People of the early modern world experienced far more transfer, intermingling of cultures, intimate interactions among disparate lives than is often assumed – as Paul Gilroy aptly demonstrates in his critical study *The Black Atlantic*. Among the hybridity, the intermixture of sundry groups that defined this era in surprising ways (in ways similar to our age of globalization), among the sharp ideological differences and cultural and racial inequities and injustices. Othello's journey is a case study. It allows us to consider not only Europe shaped Africa, but how Africa shaped Europe. Shakespeare has provided us a model in *Othello* for the ways in which literature can *ventriloquize* lost voices. Othello's biography is performative in the sense that it stands in for a historical reality for which it desires to substitute and in so doing assumes its own reality.¹⁰⁸

The poet has the luxury to choose from not only events that happened, but to invent scenes and shape them to serve an overarching vision. The poet also has a set of rhetorical techniques: verse forms, metaphor heightened language. It is not necessary to reproduce the verisimilitude of actual speech. Language is selected for its expressive power.

Language is one of the first forms of acquiescence in human life, a system that merges invention with history. The beautiful locutions of the lexical witch doctor can't be separated from the authority of the audience — which can accept or reject them. Language is both the medium through which humans strive to surpass their situation and a lattice binding us to everyone else. Language is always on loan from others, and it is always to others that our additions to it return.¹⁰⁹

It was the influential older poet Sir Philip Sidney who promulgated Aristotle's unities, it was Shakespeare, "the upstart crow" who did not feel the need to so assiduously adhere to neo-classical aesthetics.¹¹⁰

Aristotle tells us in his *Poetics* that the poet's primary concern is with telling a unified story. The poet has the luxury to choose from not only events that happened, but to invent scenes and shape them to serve an overarching vision. The poet also has a set of rhetorical techniques: verse forms, metaphor heightened language. It is not necessary to reproduce the verisimilitude of actual speech. Language is selected for its expressive power.

Unlike the poet the historian cannot invent circumstances to tie things neatly together to support a thesis. But the historian can pick and choose what she or he wishes to write about. Without claiming that Shakespeare's *Othello* is history, I can invent a biography for Othello based in historical evidence and circumstance. As the eminent historian Nathalie Zemon Davis asserts, nothing says that conjecture and speculation are outside the purview of the historian's practice - as long as the historian is clear in her intent and straightforward with the

reader. The question: “In historical writing, where does reconstruction stop, and invention begin?” is of abiding interest to Davis.¹¹¹

The historian is free to investigate the realm of the probable just as poet navigates the realm of the possible. But *the possible* is in fact a liminal space for the historian if she proceeds with an acknowledged predicate, *what if?* In the end, *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life* must pass a Truth-O-Meter test of historical context.¹¹²

Othello’s life as historical proxy is a culturally reflexive enactment that extends the dialogue between the poet and the historian. I fill in the backstory Shakespeare only hints at. In the theater, backstory refers to the story behind the story – the character’s background constructed from the given circumstances. Backstory is a term used to connote the narrative history supporting the action of the play that lends psychological depth to the drama.

That is my hope.

The Objectivity Question

As a culture, we confer the means to tell us what happened - to *interpret* what happened - into the care of trained professional historians: our gatekeepers of knowledge. On the one hand, some would say, we expect historians to interpret the past with distance in order to achieve scientific-like objectivity. Through the eyes of the historian we may hope to approximate the truth. conversely, some would caution, we must keep in mind that truth is a contingent and relative thing that we construct rather than uncover. How can this dichotomy of opinion about the historian’s process and the character of truth be reconciled? The dichotomy that attends the purpose of historical interpretation (or opinion) can be reconciled only through critical debate. Peter Novick, with nuance and mastery, has written the history of

this discourse in *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (1988).¹¹³

As one who limns the past, what is the historian's responsibility of interpretation when addressing the history and agency of a people brutally oppressed because of their skin color? From the end of the First World War through the 1950s, U. B. Phillips¹¹⁴ – a Southerner, trained at Columbia, who taught for years at Michigan and ended his teaching career at Yale – was up until only a generation ago, indisputably, the dominant figure in the field of slave studies and the antebellum South. His assertion of the *appropriateness of white supremacy* as the prime concerns of Southern history remains one of the enduring troubling legacies of America historical interpretation.

Phillips's was extraordinarily prolific; so his strong belief in the “incapacity of the Negro” was widely disseminated. Personally, he claimed not to dislike blacks (a “garrulous,” friendly sort of folk) per se, he simply diminished them in the annals of history as a people of no contributing value. In Phillips view, slavery in the Old South offered an efficient means to organize “stupid labor” on a broad scale. Bondage, Phillips argued, should be viewed as a boon - a necessary form of racial control - for people innately inferior who cannot look after themselves. How great an anomaly is Phillips in the historical profession?

Phillips was praised most lavishly in his own time by white historians; it was left to the black historians, namely W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson, to level any serious critique.¹¹⁵ In 1918, the year of its publication, Du Bois branded *American Slavery* an unconscionable defense of an inhuman and inhumane social institution.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, Phillips countervailing views were not aberrant; they were fostered by an institutionalized racism in the ranks of scholarship that preceded him. Phillips teacher at Columbia University:

William Archibald Dunning,¹¹⁷ the earliest scholar to study Reconstruction, shared Phillips' belief in "negro incapacity." It is only over time that Phillips' views came to be perceived as so extreme that he is now condemned for his prejudice. It is only in hindsight that Phillips is an embarrassment. What amounts to a defense of slavery in Phillips' scholarship, is almost beyond modern comprehension. And, yet, it is with just such a racist *apologia* that Southern Slavery is introduced into American historiography.

Yet, there are those who believe that it is wrong to hold historians accountable for beliefs that were a product of the customary values of their own time. This understanding of history through its historical context is called *historicism*. (Not to be confused with New Historicist analysis pioneered by Stephen Greenblatt and others). Its opposite is *presentism*: holding persons living an earlier time within in a different value system accountable to the standards of a present time. The concern being that to look at history in light of what is happening to you now, will lead you to distort it by projecting all your prejudices and passions back. Presentism is a convenient charge laid upon the historian who would simply argue that a scholar like Phillips has moral and ethical choices - that values are not monolithic – and that there are always dissenting views in any culture to dispute the status quo and challenge a person's adherence to conventional ideological orthodoxy. After all, U. B. Phillips had access to an entire literature of the history of abolition and emancipation that he did not allow to penetrate his racist consciousness – ditto the legacy of those principles prevalent in his own time. Furthermore, Phillips spent most of his adult life in the North where, for many, his Southern life experience was parochial. I would argue he should have – could have - known better.

He could have, should have, listened to Du Bois, who, beginning with the publication of *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, authored a body of significant books and critiques advocating the cultural, political and social relevance of black Americans to U. S. history and civic life.

The charge of presentism is a convenience for those historians who advocate dispassionate distance and objectivity in their approach to the past, believing that moral judgment is beyond the historian's purview. But this the kind of sidestepping is a lame distraction from shouldering ethical responsibility. Social theorist Charles Lemert warns against the pervasive use of the allegation of presentism as a stultifying tactic, harnessed to deflect debate from the actual problems of interpretation because it turns complaint upon the complainer. The critic is called out for ahistorical subjectivity.¹¹⁸ If valued above all else, distance and objectivity, can make you too remote from the subject, especially when you consider that the topic at hand is slavery and genocide.

Author or reader, a person's relationship to the question of historical objectivity – the revelation of unbiased truth free of any individual prompt – is largely conditioned upon the extent to which one is comfortable trusting in the humanist conception of scholarship as a practice that can transcend the pull of prevailing cultural prejudice, personal belief, and the political conditions of a particular place and time. One's relationship to historical subjectivity – the influences that inform judgments about truth or reality - also depends on accepting the perspective of an individual, university-trained expert as adequate to the task of universalizing knowledge.

I take the position that writing history is context-specific. That expertise is contingent. That scholarly opinion is necessarily circumscribed and specific. I believe that anyone in the

business of knowledge production needs to locate herself in the circumstances that impact the relativity of their individual perspective and share that information with their reader. It is my aim to be as transparent as possible with you about where I am coming from throughout this Othello project. But you the reader must always be on your guard. As those who receive the work of acknowledged specialists, readers should recognize that they – as thought consumers – are being offered a mediated reality. Readers need to become cognizant of the influences which impact the scholar mediating that reality and figure out any special(ist) intent whether it is openly offered or not.

The Other

Othello as a text has proven itself to be so much more than theater. *Othello* has emerged as a social force in global public discourse.¹¹⁹ Through the presentation of his black protagonist, Shakespeare engineers for his white audience a transformational personal encounter with the other. The poet negotiates unfamiliar intimacies and mediates anxieties by offering in “noble Othello” an idealized embodiment of the racial inversion of self, catalyzing imaginary possibilities.

“The Other” is a twentieth century philosophical notion first posed by Emmanuel Levinas to represent difference based on self as a normative standard. “Other” constitutes that which I am not.¹²⁰ As African philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe notes, the idea of “the other” has inhaled to non-whites: “The African has become not only the Other who is everyone else except me, but rather the key which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the same.”¹²¹

Influenced by the international intellectual lights – Foucault, Chomsky, Gramsci and their critique of the relationship of the powerless to the powerful in the zone of racial and ethnic difference - the term *subaltern* emerged out of the anti-colonial movement following World War II across Asia and Africa to connote the other as one oppressed: a person inherently entrenched in asymmetrical relationships of power. As a verb, “Othering” is now understood as the act of imposing the authority of dominion, of one group over another, in which the segregation of rights can be levied through the demonization of the subaltern as one to be excluded from the structures of power for essentialist reasons.

Orientalism

Written during the late seventies, Edward W. Said’s controversial book (and now canonical text of Post-colonial studies) *Orientalism*, exposed how the West constructs itself in opposition to its construction of the other. Dating from the Enlightenment and European colonization of the Arab people of the Middle East, Said defines Orientalism as the Western perception of “the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny and so on.” Orientalism provide a justification for European imperialism based upon on a hegemonic mindset in which the West mythologized the East as exotic and underdeveloped, and consequently in need of Western intervention or tutelage. It embodies the metaphor of Western domination through sexual conquest through feminizing all things Arab.¹²² By asserting that the Orient is itself a constituted entity, a representation based on skewed Western perspective, both essentialist and stereotypic, Said unsettled

traditional scholarly understanding and modes of authority with his critique of Western knowledge and its underlying assumptions.

The message that cultural bias and unadulterated political self-interest have often tarnished Western academic studies is at the heart of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Nor can we accept that point of view as a condition only of the past. The issue of representation versus reality affects every discipline of the social sciences, especially with respect to the West's construction of the Other.

In 1978, Edward Said's Orientalism recast Europe's representation of 'the Orient' as a strategic discourse, engineered to display the superiority of the West over an insistently exoticized East, the self over the other.

– Emily Bartels (2008)¹²³

As a framework that offers humanist values as opposed to Orientalist essentialisms by replacing “East-West dichotomies with intertwined histories and human experience,” *Orientalism* has influenced those disciplines that have confronted challenges to their methodological norms and standards. Orientalism has been influential, for example in the “refiguration” of anthropology as it took a “textual” or reflexive turn away from the omniscient or totalizing viewpoint assumed on the part of ethnographic fieldworkers describing technologically “primitive” societies.¹²⁴

Said revolutionized the study of the Middle East and, as a result, all oppressed peoples by identifying Orientalism as a discourse predicated on power and desire. And Said disclosed how we in the imperial West come to (mis)understand people who look different from us – who are strangers to us primarily by virtue of the color of their skin – how we reduce or essentialize them. For Said, “Orientalism” represents the Western gaze as a distanced, partisan

lens of false and ahistorical perception that reflects a persistent and uninformed European prejudice against the people and culture of the Middle East. It is a view that reflects both a fear of and fascination with a fantasized other. Said's Orientalism constitutes a framework - reflected in a stock repertory of distorted images of the Middle East and Arabs in Western art, literature and popular culture - that projects difference as overtly threatening (and insidiously so) through a manufactured and eroticized romanticism, which serves the colonial and imperial projects of Europe and the United States by justifying their imperial ambitions.

Said also propagated the post-colonial idea of the "oppressed other" by inciting discourse around the intellectual and cultural heritages of colonialism under European imperialism that gave the West the ownership of the production of knowledge about the Middle East. For this action, he extends his indictment of the West to Western scholarship, calling out Western scholars for their Eurocentrism in which false assumptions - based upon preconceived stereotypes about the Middle East and Africa - have perpetuated a pernicious bias against this antithetical non-European. In *Orientalism*, Othering is exposed as a process of exclusion whereby those who can subordinate and consign into second-class citizenship those whom they deem unworthy to fit - be it ethnically, racially, nationally, socially, politically, geographically - a proscribed social order. The greatest danger of Orientalism as an essentializing paradigm is that the object comes to accept the Western gaze as the truth about him or herself.

This translates into Othello's circumstance: in the course of Shakespeare's drama this refined, disciplined African man who has come not only to embrace but to defend European society, culture and values by the end of the play believes himself to be over the edge of barbarism.

Othello as Other

In *Othello*, evidencing a preternaturally modernist intuition, Shakespeare anticipates by hundreds of years theorizing of the Other. Indeed, Othello is the archetypal other: Othello represents the quintessence of alterity embodied in a black man of African origin navigating a supremacist white European world in which he is a racial, ethnic and cultural alien. Even though in Shakespeare's day the word "other" may not have been in use, the concept was clearly operative. Othello is described in the play as a "stranger:" ...*an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and every where.*

He is the proverbial outsider, the foreigner, the black man who is not from among the Venetians of the world of the play; he is therefore suspect. In *Othello*, Shakespeare intentionally problematizes the issues of race and sex, while contesting stereotypes. Othello, the visible racial interloper, learns that even if the color bar of Venice does not extend to the realm of the professional, indeed it does to the province of the sexual, when he elopes with a white gentlewoman. (He may be a fine fellow, but would you let your daughter marry him?) It follows, therefore, that in devising "black Othello" as a human agent for popular consideration, Shakespeare invented "the other."

Shakespeare's capacity to evoke our deepest sympathy for Othello demonstrates that –contrary to the normative standards of his time – the crime against nature in the text that the poet wishes to expose is not miscegenation but the brutalization of a fine and loving man simply because of his skin color and his choice of bride. This inversion of expected meaning for early modern English audiences is the key to the transformative power of this play. Shakespeare's intent is to humanize the African in the face of prejudicial received

information. Through the portrait of a black man as a paragon of rectitude, Shakespeare is able to unmask the reflexive heaping on of the derisive extremes of Iago's racist contempt as absurd caricature. It is a bold demonstration of Shakespeare's dramatic genius. He is way ahead of the consciousness of his age in representing a reality of *what ought to be* not of *what is*. The brilliance of the playwright lies in his ability to articulate a case for racial equality for his viewers' discernment - one which pits unmitigated racial animus up against the tragedy of benighted Othello, grievously wronged because of racial bigotry. Shakespeare achieves, as Jonathon Bate observes, the "inversion of the age's expectation that a Moor will always be barbarous and a Venetian civilized."¹²⁵ In the drama, pathos triumphs over prejudice in the public's final judgment. The politics of empathy are at the heart of this discourse. Shakespeare intuits the narrative to explain the causal realities of a changing society and public perception.

Working under the predicate that prejudice is learned behavior, Shakespeare provides us in *Othello* with a cautionary tale on the perils of essentializing race. Through *Othello* we are admonished to heed the call to racial understanding and racial justice as an act of human recognition and acknowledgement. Shakespeare's radical gesture in creating his character Othello is the impulse that summons us to act compassionately. The lesson encoded in the play is as profound and simple as that. For Shakespeare's notoriously xenophobic English countrymen and countrywomen, the idea of being asked to consider the humanity of a black African stranger was a remarkable test of evolved consciousness. Then (as well as now) facing up to this idea of the other for the white majority is key to understanding our mutual identity as human subjects and to confronting our conjoint moral concern.

For the understanding of suffering requires not only the recognition of the humanity the observer shares with the sufferer; it also requires a leap of the imagination. The intrusion of other worlds into the Europeans' imaginative and cognitive space had made this leap possible now only for those enlightened few who could still keep the existence of a universal benevolence firmly within their grasp.

– Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World*.¹²⁶

The challenge Shakespeare presents for white theatergoers or white reader's is that their response to Othello is *de facto* a response to racial difference. Do we confront Othello with empathy (like Desdemona) or with antipathy (like Iago)? And what does this encounter with the other tell us about ourselves? It is a question posed equally to Shakespeare's onetime, current, and future public. If the capacity to identify emotionally with the other through our encounter with Othello teaches us the essence of what it means to be human, it also challenges us to conduct ourselves in that knowledge. Out of compassion comes change. Othello's entry into the cultural arena was a clarion call to expand the compass of early modern English empathy to include the African other. Shakespeare made this possible in his artistry because Othello is not an abstract characterization of blackness: Othello was real to those early moderns who encountered him. He had a name.¹²⁷ Othello was a character with highly individualized feelings they could relate to as a person. They could care for him. *He is a human being*. Othello is the world's first black man to come to universal consciousness to be so considered.

Yet as a consequence we can lament the very need for that to be so. How galling is it that these English people even needed Shakespeare to remind them that black men are human?

The Authority of James Clifford

In his seminal essay “On Ethnographic Authority,” (first published in 1983 and reprinted in *The Predicament of Culture* in 1988), cultural critic James Clifford discusses how anthropologists have had to deal with changing attitudes towards the problem of representation of other cultures through the paradigm of ethnography.¹²⁸

Clifford challenges the authority of the first modern participant-observer-ethnographers who shaped representations of the other through experience and interpretation to produce academic texts based on the empirical-analytical model of Western scholarship. The authority to inscribe other cultures is vested in Western theories of interpretation that not only chauvinistically essentialize the representation of the other by stereotyping human difference based on inherent, biological, characteristics (shared by members of a group), Clifford argues, they are ahistorical. He calls upon the reader to recognize the perilous subjectivity of work based in power and dominance relationships between the observer and the observed. He is right to point out that such scholarly works have been used to serve a Western imperialist political agenda.

In place of the single-voiced (or monological) ethnographic authority Clifford proposes a polyphony of voices.

With expanded communication and intercultural influence, people interpret others, and themselves in a bewildering diversity of idioms - a global condition of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1953) called called “heteroglossia.”¹²⁹

In the new order, Clifford offers that polyphonous or heteroglossic ethnographic representations mark a critical change by recognizing the intersubjectivity of ethnography. As a corrective, post-modern ethnography is to be dialogic – a conversation between the observer

and the observed. The resulting text must both acknowledge and reflect that it has been cooperatively written or fashioned in “representative” (not literal) dialogue, integrating the researcher’s perspective with that of his/her subject “in a counterpoint of authorial voices.”¹³⁰

The “utopian” view of such a study might be, Clifford tells us, “the notion of a book entirely composed of quotations,” which “is a modernist dream associated with cultural theorist Walter Benjamin.”¹³¹ What the concept of a book entirely composed of quotations effectively does, is relinquish authoritative authorship to others and thereby avert the imposition of an assertive, single point of view. As Benjamin scholar Eli Frelander explains, “Needless to say, this is not because of the author’s deference to authority, but rather is itself a mode of establishing the highest authority or sovereignty of thinking.” The perspective of multiple minds. It is this that draws Clifford to Benjamin.

In spite of what might be suspected, however, a book composed entirely of quotations does not belie intentionality on the part of the author/compiler – this because such a book necessitates scholarly mastery in the selection of the quotations that shape a cohesive narrative. “Quoting a text requires interpreting its context,” Walter Benjamin writes. Still, quoting a text does not necessarily mean giving credit through attribution, he makes clear. *Conveying* the truth is not the goal for Benjamin. Truth is unapproachable because truth must reveal itself rather than be coerced. Language is not just a means of representation, it is the medium of investigation, hence the use of quotations. “To write history...means to *cite* history,” according to Benjamin.¹³²

Benjamin imagines his book of textual quotations in terms of a technique in art production: as a mosaic. Fittingly, a mosaic is an assembly of pieces that cohere into a whole through the intervention of the artist. As a historian, I have been fascinated by Benjamin’s

dream of a book made up entirely of quotations since I first encountered this idea in Clifford's essay many years ago. Whatever term used, be it mosaic, collage, montage – and irrespective of the materials used (text, shards of glass, found objects, fragments of photographs) – the resolve to create a new work from the deliberate arrangement of unrelated but congruent pieces is the same for the historian as it is for the artist. Mosaic, montage, collage is merely a technique of assembly. As I see it, my work as an historian is made from organizing an array of discovered or found items to create a new whole.

In the realm of art, Shakespeare provides us with an example – to masterful effect – of how borrowing from fellow artists becomes more than sampling. Famously, the plots of Shakespeare's plays are not his own. The storylines are sourced from an array of original material at the author's disposal, which include other playwrights' works (both contemporary and classical authors); historical chronicles; non-dramatic classical texts; and popular prose fictions (both English and Italian). In the case of *Othello*, it is an Italian novella by Cinthio that inspired him. Because of his extensive use of other-author-generated-materials upon which to model his own works some have labeled Shakespeare an unoriginal appropriator.

To understand Shakespeare's literary production in context, we must remember that in the poet's time playwrights worked for hire and their plays technically were owned by the acting troops that performed them. Elizabethan dramatists labored in a system similar to the way today's film studios operate; the production companies buy outright the work of content creators who cede their authorship rights for a onetime fee. This as opposed to the independence of modern playwrights who retain the rights to their own works. In Shakespeare's lifetime there was no such thing as copyright protection, and publishing playscripts was an unregulated and haphazard practice.

Rather than an appropriator, I consider Shakespeare a true collage artist. To the extent that Shakespeare is a re-constructor of existing texts, he is a practitioner of assemblage. He is assembling not only things – characters, words and plots – but cultural impulses. If that were not so scholars would not be able to deconstruct his sources and the intellectual antecedents from his texts. Shakespeare’s plays truly represent that “sovereignty of thinking” called for by Benjamin that comes from a collective influence on authorship. One thing is clear; as a dramatist, Shakespeare unequivocally improved on all that he touched – once it touched him.

Elaborating further on the instrumentality of quotations as a textual strategy, Clifford cites in “On Ethnographic Authority” another literary theorist, Roland Barthes: if a text “is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture,” then “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.” A destination where, Clifford offers, the text “is given coherence in particular acts of reading ... readings beyond the control of any single authority.”¹³³ And so it follows, dear reader, ethnographic authority lies in *you*.

Clifford’s notion of authority vested in the reader through a dialogic engagement with the text informs my work. My purpose in writing this book is to create a chain of ideas and images that create a narrative or sense of commentary that situates *Othello* at the center of a discourse – of a dialogue with you – that taps into twenty-first-century American racial consciousness and our pathway to it as a nation. What drives my selection of texts for treatment and inclusion in this study of *Othello* is the extent which these materials store cultural memory regarding intercultural encounter and the construction of race. I am after that “sovereignty of thinking” Benjamin evokes that comes from Clifford’s polyphonic approach.

I find my materials in the archives; in history books and scholarly journals; in newspapers and magazines, in literature; in art and visual culture; and in books about

literature, the theater, art, and culture. I frequently cull from journalism and creative non-fiction. My objective is to place us together – contemporary author and modern reader – in conversation with our racial past by acknowledging its influence on our shared present. Facts are only meaningful if they help us to make meaning.

Historians live in the world and form opinions. They are not immune to the circumstances of their own conditioning. Asserting that the historian has no contextualizing position drawn from socialization and experiential preconception is a canard that is just as value-laden as an acknowledged interpretative bias or *conscious* adherence to a constructed theoretical epistemology. Judgments are conveyed in the selection of facts, and facts do not shape themselves. And what of the unconscious? Can the historian always know whether or not she is judgment free? Should she be? Better to acknowledge the perspective of one's position in the quest for balance – at least to oneself – I say. Otherwise how can someone compensate for gaps in experience and lapses in awareness. One has to strive not only for objectivity as an illusory goal but also for consciousness.

Denial will get you nowhere. As for out-and-out partiality, is it inconceivable that blind prejudice is something for which a trained historian may be found guilty? Unconditional commitment to and faith in the historian's methodology of professional practice does not lead to enlightened views if scholars frame their research through ideological prisms that no unbiased reading of the data can penetrate.

There is no past; there are just versions of the past. Proving one version true settles absolutely nothing, because proving another is equally possible.

– André Aciman, "How Memoirists Mold the Truth"¹³⁴

The Nature of History

Like anthropology history has taken a textual or narrative turn. This narrative turn in history confers authorship status on the historian. History is now to be understood as a narrative humanly constructed by the historian rather than truth revealed through empirical investigation. Hence history is a narrative about the past formed in the consciousness of the present and not a reflection of an uncovered distant past. The past is in the present. The present informs my reading of the past. The reader will bring his or her own experience to this project. In that act of reading we will interrogate each other. The sense of urgency in our own time comes from our sense of history – our social memory.

I look for linkages that connect Othello's life and times to our world today. By emphasizing history as an act of storytelling, in my case the imagined story of Othello's journey through the black Atlantic world constructed on historical evidence, I set up a novel take on that ages-old dynamic: the opposition between facts and interpretation. This seemingly contradictory balance between reality and fiction is grounded in the circumstances that compel narrative. Narrative is all we have to make sense of human experience. Stories are both historical artifact and cultural product. As Hannah Arendt observed in her consciousness altering 1952 treatise, *The Human Condition*, our "ability to produce stories" is the way we "become historical."¹³⁵ The historian is a medium to bring to awareness that which would be gone, un-remembered without her intercession.

And as Natalie Zemon Davis persuasively argues in *Slaves on Screen*, for this process to have integrity we depend upon the historian to construct this bridge between memory and oblivion within the ethical context of his/her modern disciplinary practice: The historian's

ethical compass being formed by her cultures of origin: nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion.¹³⁶

This Othello project is concerned with how we remember. Not just how we reconstruct the known past but how we resurrect what's forgotten.

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.

– Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"¹³⁷

The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life, like all works of history, tells us as much about the historian and the moment in which the book is written as it does the subject itself. "Historical narratives speak to us less about reality than they do about whoever has constructed them," advises Carlo Ginzberg.¹³⁸ The moment we live acknowledges the change that has occurred in academic disciplines that has opened the door to multicultural opportunities of interpretation societies and groups with, as Stuart Hall notes, "new networks of meaning which individuals and groups use to make sense of and communicate with one another."¹³⁹

Art, because of the volatile nature of the subject, can be – in its violation of normative standards – outrageous. Because of its disciplinary probity, when history is transgressive, when it ignores the traditional bounds of the discipline, it can only muster the tag disobedient. Which means, disobedient in topic; in methodology; and in concept or story. The acts of transgressions to standard historical inquiry I engage in this study include: the biography of a fictional character as subject matter; an interdisciplinary that combines perspectives from history, literature, theater, and the other arts and cross-cultural scholarship.

A platform for synthesizing ideas, this project is a synoptic work of history. It is both intellectual and cultural history (the history of difference, the history of consciousness) and social history (history written from the bottom up, from the middle, as well as looking at the top from below and other radiant perspectives). It resurrects the lives of those long forgotten whose stories were never recorded, because they lived in the margins. We find Othello in intersections and wedged in the interstices of social recognition and classification - slaves, servants, the poor, and the displaced – and those who consigned them to obscurity. It is about the socio-political and cultural forces that shaped the world they shared.

No one is omniscient and undertaking this work is a humbling endeavor. But in departing from the professional historians institutionalized comfort zone of analysis based on specializations in national cultures or nation states, I invite us to consider just how contingent those disciplinary divisions are in the first place.

The nature of difference and the construction of identity and how this is represented in our social imaginary I consider the most critical issue of our time and for the arts of our time. It is the measure of human agency. I care deeply about the ongoing global initiative that drives the enlargement of individual rights.

I hope to make a contribution as an innovative thinker who redefines the nature of performance-making through history-making: the ways we think about representation and historical memory. I undertake this not only as a pioneer in the historical field, for using a fictional character – Othello – as a historical surrogate, but also as a pioneer in the field of theater history, for bringing political, cultural and social history to bear on a fictional character as historical agent.

I have attempted to create this study of Othello as a signifying figure in the history of race as a serious analytical work that will engage scholars, certainly. But in all honesty I am also concerned that this be an act of storytelling that will please the general public. I am less concerned in showing off my erudition than in surprising readers with a wealth of information they have never heard before and from viewpoints they have never had occasion to previously consider.

Race and Racism

Part of the aversion to engaging in polite conversation about race in Early Modern England that I encountered (and continue to encounter), I believe is that the present era and its attitudes towards race make discussing the topic of race in any era and location a minefield, and Renaissance England is no exception. Even among scholars of race in the period, very few, if any, consensuses are reached. Everything from how race was defined in Early Modern England to who was considered a racialized being is up for debate. Whether race was defined by color, nationality, bloodlines, gender, religion, as a commodity, through culture, through encounters, or all or none of the above have all been questions with no real resolution.

– Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama* (2017).¹⁴⁰

It is inevitable that we should come to a discourse around race and racism when considering a historical study of *Othello*. And with that comes a set of attendant problems. The issue of race is “sensitive, potentially, explosive, and resistant to resolution.” Although historian of slavery, David Brion Davis wrote these words twenty years ago in his Introduction to the groundbreaking volume of *The William and Mary Quarterly*, “Constructing Race” (1997), nothing has changed.¹⁴¹

“The concept of race,” according to Sandra Adell, “like the concepts of Being and

subjectivity,” is “both universal and undefinable”.¹⁴² In an article tellingly entitled “America's Caste System: Will It Change?” in the *New York Review of Books* (1997), George M. Fredrickson defined race *descriptively* as “America's oldest and most persistent problem,” echoing W.E.B. Du Bois’ well-worn and lamentable truism: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”¹⁴³ Make no mistake about it, the problem of the color-line also defines the twenty-first century. We did not as a nation adequately address, let alone solve, this intractable problem before the proverbial crystal ball dropped on the new millennium.

Traditionally in American history scholarship, the treatment of the topic of race redounds to a discussion of slavery. And ever since race became a collective concern during the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s, the subject of racialized slavery has been conducted across a conceptual and rhetorical divide which goes something like this. Did the forced bondage of black Africans precede or follow the emergence of collective and deeply rooted prejudice in white Europeans and Euro-Americans? Of interest is whether the brutalization of black people in a system of forced labor bred the racism that demonized the enslaved in the eyes of their oppressors or whether their enslavement was justified because Africans were brutish and uncivilized to Western eyes in the first place – and were therefore natural slaves.

“Natural slavery” was a social theory put forward by Aristotle in his treatise on political philosophy, *Politics, Book I*. As a concept, it is based on this ancient Greek’s controversial belief that some people are slaves by nature. It is an expedient theory “which justified slavery” as a social institution and “created a natural framework for bound labor.”¹⁴⁴ It was not a theory tied to race per se, and has been found by scholars to be extremely flawed in its internal logic.¹⁴⁵ But Aristotle’s Natural Slave theory informed the debate over which

came first, racism or slavery – is at the crux of what has come to be known in US field historiography as the “Origins Debate.” Did racism beget slavery or did slavery beget racism?¹⁴⁶

It is important to establish that we have moved on from the “Origins Debate,” and historians now see race and racial attitudes constructed by Europe, and consequently by America, as a far more subtle and complex phenomenon than the Manichean either/or of the classic – Was it the chicken or the egg? – argument.

There can be no doubt that Slavery produced racism, in the sense that the negative stereotypes that had been applied to slaves and serfs since antiquity, regardless of ethnicity, were ultimately transferred to black slaves and then to most people of African descent after bondage became almost exclusively confined to blacks. On the other hand, there is a sense in which people of dark skin were made to order for Europeans who had struggled for centuries to find markers that would justify class polarities and also affinity, even at some distance outdoors, people who could be classified as “natural slaves.”

– David Brion Davis, “The Culmination of Racial Polarities and Prejudice” (1999)¹⁴⁷

Further to recognizing the subtleties that exist outside the “Origins Debate,” we must also acknowledge that racism developed differently in different European countries based on people’s experience of direct contact with Africans or the presence of Africans within their own societies.

As early slave societies as well as early slave traders among their European brethren, the late medieval and early modern Iberian empires of Portugal and Spain set the table for defamatory racialist attitudes and behavior towards blacks and erstwhile racial Others in the age of European expansion. Overseas expansion and the attendant settlement of colonies,

“stimulated the classification of varieties of human beings.” It “created a coherent set of ideas and practices concerning hierarchies of peoples from different continents.”¹⁴⁸

The English came late to the table, but as James H. Sweet has made a career of arguing, the Iberian roots of racist thought imbued English perceptions early on: "the Muslims created a plethora of racist ideas, but it was the Iberians who, in conjunction with a rising demand for slave labor, turned these ideas into a coherent ideology... Iberian racism was a necessary precondition for the system of human bondage that would develop in the Americas during the sixteenth century and beyond."¹⁴⁹

English sea captain Richard Jobson made a trading voyage to Africa in 1620-21, but he refused to engage in the Portuguese practice of trafficking in human beings, because, he said, the English "were a people who did not deal in any such commodities, neither did we buy or sell one another or any that had our own shapes." When the local dealer protested that it was the custom there to sell Africans "to white men," Jobson answered "they were another kind of people from us..."¹⁵⁰

As Bethencourt notes “the debasement of inferior *castas* in the Iberian world could reach a level of dehumanization via animal metaphors transferred to northern European colonial cultures.”¹⁵¹ But these most pernicious views were only just brewing in Britain during a brief period of relative tolerance when Shakespeare wrote *Othello* – a time before England became the pre-eminent slave trading nation of the world in the late seventeenth century. This is what makes *Othello* such an extraordinary artifact of English racial attitudes of the time. For in Iago, a Spanish inflected character, we have extreme racist views expressed, while, conversely, in the attitude of the patrician Venetian duke we see evidence of surprising racial tolerance – even when it comes to the interracial union between Othello and

Desdemona.

All this before any early English tolerance for the racial Other went by the wayside.

The view that race is a socially constructed and not a biologically constructed concept is a consensus position members of the academy have adopted for decades now, even though the complex processes of a socially constructed racial formation are not well understood largely due to the multiple and varied range of contributing factors. Behind this position is the science that corrects all destructive racial myths of biology that were offered over the years.¹⁵² It is thanks to the Human Genome project we now have conclusive scientific evidence that race *is* a social construct because there are no “race genes.”¹⁵³ Biological difference based on racial categories are therefore a canard. Furthermore, we have proof of an “African Eve,” a *Homo sapiens sapiens* woman who lived on the land mass we now call Africa. The astonishing truth of science here is that her genetic material has survived for nearly 200,000 years in every human being living today, thus providing each of us with a shared African ancestor and a unified genetic history that began in Africa.¹⁵⁴

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. cautioned thirty years ago that even with the debunking of a genetic race theory that the old problems of biological definition were still thriving, embedded in the social fabric, even though they had been utterly disproved by science. And race myths persist to this day as received information that unconsciously conditions our perceptions.

Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, of adherents of specific belief systems within—more often than not—also have fundamentally oppose economic interests Race is the; ultimate trope of difference because it is so arbitrary in its application.¹⁵⁵

As Gates avers, it is not enough to say the proven absence of genetic racial difference among blacks and whites can change the social reality of pernicious racism that has been

fueled by erroneously constructed social attitudes that endure over time.¹⁵⁶

In the same vein, Frederickson bursts the celebratory bubble of the Academy's when he declares that among scholars "the proposition that race is 'a social and cultural construction,' has become an academic cliché."¹⁵⁷ And he points out that "as a practical matter" the concept of race cannot be considered anodyne just because it has lost its biological definition since "social and cultural constructions can serve equally well to justify the enslavement, forced segregation, or even the extermination of people designated as having inferior ancestry or bad genes."¹⁵⁸ This is why American still has a "race problem."¹⁵⁹

I agree with those who now argue that race relations in America today are more polarizing than ever. And I invite you to consider the masterful presentation of such views by Ibram X. Kendi in his forthright new book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2016), an intellectual history of prejudice.¹⁶⁰ With the exit from the stage of our first black president and the entrance of the anti-Obama in his place, we are, frankly, at a nadir. Far from being post-racial, demonstrated in the election of a black president, we now have a president who is unapologetically racist. One who caters to a political base that would roll back the clock on its perceived right to legally assert white privilege and legislatively restore white supremacist policies.

It is clear that even though the world of science has debunked the theory of race as not biologically determined and thus rendered it a useless scientific classification of humankind, the alternative premise that race is a socially constructed phenomenon that was built over time is scant comfort in a world where society has not kept pace with science in rendering racial categorization a thing of the past. For even though categorizing human difference based on genetically classified racial groups has been exposed as counterfactual, race and racial

classification still set the agenda that dictates human behavior in all ranks of American society.

As law professor Angela Onwuachi-Willig writes in *The New York Times* (2106), “unlike race and racial identity, the social, political and economic meanings of race, or rather belonging to particular racial groups, have not been fluid.” So we can talk all we want to about being liberated from a biological basis for race, but being a member of a racial minority in the United States still means you will be subjected to judgment and discrimination based not on the content of your character, but on the color of your skin. “Racial meanings for non-European groups have remained stagnant. For no group has this reality been truer than African-Americans.”¹⁶¹

I must note, however, that Francis Bethencourt writing in his monograph *Racisms:* (2013), identifies an interesting twist on the sociological condition Onwuachi-Willig underscores. By identifying a proactive and empowering response on the part of black Americans to the centuries-old predicament of institutionalized racial discrimination in a society where “racial classification is part of all bureaucratic inquires,” it has come to pass that “the noun race has been taken over by African Americans, and reinstated as an expression of collective identity and a political tool against discrimination.” Thus, in present day America we find that in this certain context the “idea of racial classification as a social construct to justify hierarchies and monopolize resources has been turned on its head.”¹⁶² Notwithstanding the positive issues of black agency Bethencourt applauds here, this is nonetheless quite an indictment. This recent social phenomenon that Bethencourt offers up is actually an extreme case of doing your best in a bad situation.

Let me just respond that as a nation we are going to have to do better than this – white

America is going to have to do better than this. And we will have to fight our present government (depending on how long Trump and his ilk can hang on) in order to do so. The question is, how? Is it worth heeding the words of David Brion Davis, a man who devotes his life to making meaning of our racial past?

To understand the meaning of race in the future, we must first uncover the historical and cultural contexts of the past in which separate human races were conceived. Since responsible scientists have long discredited any biological or genetic definition of racial groups, historians have increasingly recognized that the so-called races of mankind are the fortuitous and arbitrary inventions of European and American history, the by-products, primarily, of Europe's religious, economic, and imperial expansion across the seas of the earth.¹⁶³

Is it still possible that learning our history can make a difference? As an historian of race, I most avowedly say yes. And I will resolutely proceed with this, my *Othello* project, as if this were so, hoping to make a difference in offering an historical context for improved racial understanding through my scholarship. But it will be a challenge.

Ira Berlin, in *Many Thousands Gone* (1998) writes that race as an exclusively theoretical concept has undermined action. The theory of race as a social construct has also inhibited the discussion of the origins of racism by strangulating the terms of the discourse¹⁶⁴ under which it can be discussed. Thus we are left today stymied by the persistence of the legacy of race and confined in our discourse. Confined in such a way that color-coded attitudes towards race can only have meaning, we as historians are told, only after the word race becomes associated with skin color, ergo there is no such thing as racism until race was an ideological concept socially constructed around pigment.

So when did that occur? Gary Taylor in *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity From Columbus to Hip-Hop* (2005), marks this date later than the Age of Expansion but earlier than when scientific theories of race began to take hold in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, which is the dating that most scholars work with. “By 1700 most Englishman, Taylor writes, perhaps all Englishman—considered themselves ‘white’ in a sense that we would recognize today.” Interestingly, he notes becoming white was as much a part of being labeled white when white people were ‘discovered by others.’”¹⁶⁵

By defining racism as a thought process that “attributes a single set of real or imaginary physical and/or mental features to precise ethnic groups, and believes these features to be transmitted from generation to generation and that ethnic groups are considered inferior or divergent from the norm represented by the reference group, thus justifying discrimination or segregation,”¹⁶⁶ Bethencourt traces racism’s evolution from as early as the Crusades.

He adds to this – his singular contention – the notion that “racism is triggered by political projects that are connected to specific economic conditions.” Thus racism should be seen as “relational,” that it is consonant within the context of specific social hierarchies and particular circumstances. Racism, he argues, is therefore not inevitable. Its practice is not an essential part of the social make-up of humankind. “Racism,” Bethencourt underscores, “can be fed or deterred by influential powers, and is channeled by a complex web that can change the forms and targets of racism.”¹⁶⁷ In short, Bethencourt’s point is this: “throughout history, racism as prejudice concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action has been motivated by political projects.”¹⁶⁸ This is why he presents his study of racism as a phenomenon to be determined by “ethnic prejudice as well as practice of discrimination and segregation.” And, thus, he justifies through more nuanced definition than what is standard, taking racism’s origin’s date back to the early Middle Ages.¹⁶⁹

I agree with Bethencourt, because I think the inference here is that racism is learned and not innate – and that its practice is neither uniform nor absolute. In its relational aspects,

racism is a socially constructed mindset based on what is perceived to be immutable human difference that one group, the dominant group, finds threatening to its sense of self and can exploit in some way. Even to the point of annihilation of the threatening racial Other. Whether we are talking about Hitler's targeting of the Jews in Nazi Germany or the forced migration of black Africans to provide a labor force to build the New World, we should concern ourselves with, as Bethencourt asks, "Under what conditions were discrimination and segregation transformed into racial extermination?"¹⁷⁰

In spite of outliers like Bethencourt (and me), the trend over past years is for historians to adhere to a strict timeline when discussing race. The prevailing thinking being that race is an "eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century" invention tied to "a scientific framework provided by the theory of races." Therefore, discussions of race are inappropriate prior to this dating, or so the argument goes.¹⁷¹ But this proposition, "that the theory of races precedes racism," and thus historians are restricted in the usage of the term as applied to the early modern world, I agree with Ira Berlin is an unnecessarily self-limiting practice. As we have seen, Bethencourt deftly demonstrates in his exhaustive study that racism was a component of human behavior well before any theories of race were established, and so he neatly ties up this argument.¹⁷²

I for one am grateful to him for his aggressively having taken this topic on.

Literary historians of the early modern era are confronted with this same standard conundrum, which has been tricky for them to navigate. Shakespeare scholars, even more than intellectual historians perhaps, have been apologetic about using race as a signifier. For what infects this field, Shaul Bassi tells us, is a Shakespeare-centric twist on the problem that adds baggage: "racial thinking is quintessentially a nineteenth-century product, a powerful action almost invariably aimed at establishing some sort of ethnic hierarchy and, in this

special case, at appropriating the enormous symbolic capital granted by Shakespeare.”¹⁷³

Meaning that Shakespeare’s output was harnessed to serve the agenda of racist thinking in creating a theory of the races. As such, *The Merchant of Venice* becomes exclusively an indictment against the cupidity of Jews and *Othello* serves as an indictment of Africans’ venery and a cautionary tale against miscegenation.

This leads to the concerning question, does looking backwards through the lens of racism privilege the perspective of prejudice rather than highlight its delegitimization? And, meaningfully, this question leads to a more foundational critical concern. Do we really need to consider the application of race a retrograde academic function for Shakespeare studies because Shakespeare is unwittingly implicated in bogus scientific theory centuries after his writing?

As a result of these questions, the notion that racism was invented in the nineteenth century when a scientific taxonomy of racial difference was formed has been an obstacle to scholars of Shakespeare feeling fully justified in discussing race and racism in the early modern period. They are well-conditioned to concerns for charges of presentism. As the argument goes, if the concept of race is deemed to be an anachronism in Shakespeare’s time, how can scholars comfortably use race as a lens through which to interpret Shakespeare’s poems and plays with any kind of authority?

Is this not, as Shaul Bassi asks in his new book *Shakespeare’s Italy and Italy’s Shakespeare: Place, “Race,” Politics* (2016), merely “projecting contemporary configurations of race onto the past?”¹⁷⁴

I do not think so. And I invite the doubters to read Bethencourt’s *Racism*.

I also invite them to consider what Matthieu Chapman, writing in *Anti-Black Racism*

in Early Modern English Drama (2107), has to say on this subject.

While I cautiously agree...that we cannot ‘simply retrofit our contemporary conceptions of race into Early Modern England...’, I do not wish to disregard completely the usefulness of all facets of contemporary notions of race in deciphering racialized difference in Early Modern England. ‘Retrofitting contemporary notions of race...is problematic, but I question the complete dismissal of contemporary race studies with which most scholars of Early Modern England approach race. I find this dismissal troubling for many reasons, but two stand out. First, dismissing contemporary notions of race as anachronistic is troubling because it assumes that notions of race are limited to specific historical moments and not part of a larger continuum. While it would be impertinent to assume that race functions exactly the same way today as it did in Renaissance England, we cannot dismiss that notions of race, particularly as it pertains to blackness, do have their roots largely in this period ... Second, this dismissal of current notions of race assumes that race has become a stable and universally accepted concept ... So while to say simply that race today is the same as race in Early Modern England is problematic, so too is it problematic to assume that race today can tell us nothing of race in Early Modern England.’¹⁷⁵

I propose that rather than be in such a state of anxiety about how we as scholars of the Renaissance err in projecting our present racial consciousness onto the past, perhaps we should instead be asking instead how this history helps us to reexamine both issues of color prejudice and multiculturalism, how the past may speak to the complexities of our modern times.

Race and racism are words that I have never hesitated in using vis-à-vis Shakespeare when applied to historical inquiry, because, in the first place, I believe evidence for the existence of racism in the time of Shakespeare is demonstrated in the play itself. When Desdemona’s father voices his crisis-ridden concern that Desdemona’s union with black Othello will destroy the purity of his family’s white European bloodlines, he is articulating racial beliefs of the time. This because the word “race” started to be used in the late Middle Ages in Italy as a definition of noble lineage. What greater evidence of racialist beliefs in Shakespeare’s time do we need than that?

But I do recognize that all this controversy around race as a method of inquiry applied to the early modern era is vexing. I concur that the first issue for the Shakespeare scholar needs to address requires establishing “‘race’ as an analytical category,” in the first place. Which, clearly, I am not immune from feeling the need to do. From a usage perspective, as Bassi tells us, “[i]n browsing recent literature, we gather that as late as the 1990s, “race” as an analytical category was still conspicuous by its absence in Shakespearean criticism....”¹⁷⁶ But in spite of the slow beginning and the awkwardness of employing racial analytics, there is no question that this deficiency has been remedied. For use of race as a central organizing category in Shakespeare Studies has certainly arrived. Over the past thirty years Shakespeare “race” critics have opened what Bassi identifies as an “important field of inquiry.”¹⁷⁷ Even if these “race” critics must construct legitimizing arguments to do so.

They have described the rise of a national and imperial English ideology fashioned in part through the real and symbolic exploitation of many exotic aliens; they have shown how certain plays are far more global than “domestic” and they have mapped a complex semiotic of blackness. Sidelineing the misleading question of whether Shakespeare was a racist or not, they have shown how his plays can be put to racist as well as antiracist theatrical and pedagogical uses.¹⁷⁸

Bassi enlists the words of Ayana Thompson, a prominent African American Shakespeare scholar who is avowedly race-centric in her scholarship, to underscore this all-encompassing change in focus:

When I teach Shakespeare in my university classes, when I see a contemporary Shakespearean production on film, the stage ..., or the Internet, when I hear and see allusions to Shakespeare in commercials, television shows, and the popular media, I see race: whiteness, blackness, Hispanic-ness, Asian-ness, the normatively raced, and the deviantly raced. It is always there; it is always present; it always impacts the way Shakespeare is being employed. And ... I am always surprised when others don't mention it – the good, the bad, and the ugly – because race is the giant elephant in the room.¹⁷⁹

Bassi's counter "claim is that to the detriment of all these achievements" he lists, including Thompson's, "'race' critics have promoted a diffusion and naturalization of 'race' that is not immune from perilous side effects, derived from older and pernicious uses of the category."¹⁸⁰ This is a justifiable concern that Bethencourt describes this way: "the noun race has become too contaminated by the political practices of segregation and extermination to be used by researchers unreflectively."¹⁸¹ Unreflectively, yes. But need we leap to Bassi's conclusion, which is to abandon its use altogether? "So," Bassi, posits, "the consequent question is: can we promote the same political and critical agenda without recourse to 'race'?" Is there a way to avoid these "older and pernicious uses of the category?", "Or is any erasure of 'race,' as Thompson warns us, just an omission or a form of disavowal?"¹⁸²

This is indeed the crux of the politics of race that determine the choices Shakespeare scholars make every day. And, Bassi, an Italian scholar of Shakespeare's cannon, cannot help but lament that the treatment of race in Shakespeare literary studies is dictated in the Anglophone world largely by American scholars. Ergo, when it comes to race, the field is inflected with America's exceptional relationship with all matters of racial prejudice, deeply imbedded in a culture of white privilege and institutional racism.¹⁸³ For Bassi, this is a problem. It is a problem for him because he finds it skews the discourse, even though he is willing to point out that it cannot be denied that Shakespeare race criticism has made a precious contribution to that "new cultural politics of difference that has challenged an abstract – but inherently Eurocentric – universalism."¹⁸⁴ Still, Bassi would ask, "If *we* are not sure what "race" is, if *they* did not employ it, if not remotely, why use it in the first place?"¹⁸⁵

Why? Because his premise is false to begin with. But furthermore, to argue that race is merely a time-sensitive social theory is to deny its very real painful consequences on peoples

lives. Race is about power, not biology. Theodore W. Allen in *The Invention of the White Race* (1994),¹⁸⁶ “it concerns the historian only as it relates to a pattern of oppression (subordination, subjugation, exploitation) of one group of human beings by another.” It is the most potent signifier we have of ethnic supremacy – which is practiced irrespective of a theory. But even if you are one who would parse race to the same degree the scientific purists demand, try substituting the term color prejudice for race. Color prejudice and fear of blood mixing were certainly a reality of the early modern European world. By using “race,” as a cultural signifier in Othello, for example, are we really so far off the mark?

For Bassi, yes. He is opposed even to the “broad modernist position,” which locates the origins of European racism in the fifteenth century, because “a continuist view focusing primarily on the fact of blackness tells a very partial story in the sadly dense history of European racism.”¹⁸⁷

Therefore, the argument follows, that any discussion of race in the age of Shakespeare is anachronistic because race, as a term, was not defined by blackness or whiteness, when race, to us today, really is a matter of black and white. The problems you incur when the notion that “racism presupposes the existence of race” as defined by these narrow terms, prevents scholars from identifying color-coded prejudice where it clearly exists. That condition of refusing to read blackness in Shakespeare where it exists, which so vexes Kim Hall.¹⁸⁸ Stephen Orgel twice makes the point in his essay “Marginal Johnson” that *xenophobia* – “something the English understood well” rather than “racism” – which we must infer they did not understand because they lacked a scientific definition, accounts for the expressed dislike they experience towards black people. Ergo, he therefore chooses not to read a young white noblewoman’s aversion to the “tawny” Prince of Morocco in *The*

Merchant of Venice as a matter of race. This is an argument that simple strains credulity. For when in Shakespeare's play the courtly Prince of Morocco is presented as a legitimate suitor for the hand of the wealthy heiress, he importunes "fair" Portia, not to be swayed by prejudice towards his color in considering him a suitable husband:

*Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phæbus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,
And let us make incision for your love,
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
Hath fear'd the valiant: by my love, I swear
The best regarded virgins of our clime
Have lov'd it too: I would not change this hue,
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.*
(2.1.1–14)

For all his wealth, class, gentility and *diplomacy* Portia cannot contain her relief when the Moroccan Prince fails to solve the riddle and chose the casket that would make her the Moor's bride. And she confides to her ladies after the Prince is out of earshot that this is an enormous relief to her because she would not want to marry a man of his color:

*A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go.
Let all of his complexion choose me so.*
(2.7.1068)

Portia's negative attitude towards a man whose skin is dark is representative of the cultural attitudes of her day. That she takes pains to hide her aversion from her African guest out of polite deference for his feelings is, it would seem, unusual. Is it possible that

Shakespeare is expressing a consciousness of the arbitrariness of assigning difference based on skin color here? To co-opt a phrase from Winthrop D. Jordan, could the playwright not be “writing both *about* and *to* his countrymen’s feelings concerning physical disinclination between peoples”? (Jordan 1974: 20). But Portia’s aversion to the Prince of Morocco’s complexion, and his conditioned presupposition that this is likely to be so, makes it impossible to ignore that Portia’s unfavorably response to the Prince is based on color-coded prejudice and not xenophobia.

Furthermore, Shakespeare imbeds a contemporaneous scientific theory of racial difference into the Prince of Morocco’s speech, which posits that the sun has created a darker race than White Europeans on the permanently scorched skin of Africans. This early modern scientific theory of the races may not have been true – or lasted. But the so-called science of later centuries was equally false, as it turns out.

But Bassi’s suggestion that we substitute the “less compromised and more nuanced category of ethnicity” for race – which is essentially Orgel’s argument in this particular case – is simply not convincing to me.¹⁸⁹ It will tell a story far more partial than blackness, in my view.

Bethencourt is sympathetic to the argument that race is an unstable noun because it reflects the complications of its historical usage, as we have seen, particularly when it is tied to “practices of segregation and extermination.”

This explains why anthropologists and historians [and, yes, Shakespeare scholars] have started to search alternative terms to designate collective groups outside the ideological and anachronistic constraints of racial classification. The noun ethnic has provided an obvious choice... This term promised to combine the notions of collective identity and “otherness” without being loaded with racial prejudices.¹⁹⁰

But this very designation, which takes “ethnic” outside the bounds of “racial prejudices” just underscores its very limits. Better to use “race” when the term applies, but encourage scholars to use it “reflectively.”¹⁹¹

Ultimately, these are semantic disquisitions. But that they have real world impact and should not be dismissed lightly. And even Shaul Bassi, who seems to delight in going down this discursive road, acknowledges this critical point: “Racism is too entrenched an evil to delude oneself that it will go away by simply erasing race.”¹⁹² Better to heed Ayana Thompson’s warning that to erase race is not just a rhetorical omission but is rather a form of disavowal of the non-members of a not-so-abstract Eurocentric universalism.¹⁹³ This because race is not some academic conceit. There are real-world consequences scholars have an obligation to consider – lest they do more damage than they have done in the past.

So, to sum up, just because the term “race” was rarely used in the modern sense in Shakespeare’s day, does not mean that the English and continental Europeans were indifferent to the obvious marks of racial difference.

There is no question that black skin *becomes* a scientific problem during this period ... The inherent peculiarity of black skin, it seems, produced a scientific skepticism regarding classical natural philosophy, which then led to the distinctly unscientific conclusion that dark complexions were a phenomenon that fell outside the bounds of nature.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, to be black in the early modern period was clearly to be associated with being a slave, although not all slaves were black and not all blacks were slaves.

This is where it is critically important to incorporate the perception of *status* in the discussion of race. Status at its most essential is a state, condition or situation. Status simply means one somebody perceives someone else to be in the same state of condition or situation as one’s self. Once the terms of allegiance to a corporate group is established people compete

for ranked social status associated with prestige within the society to which they belong. Social status reflects the degree of honor or prestige attached to one's position in society. A position of honor or prestige, comes from power – political, economic, intellectual or spiritual. Elites have the social status to transcend xenophobia, and prejudice. Gradations of status explains how Europeans could treat some Africans with honor, how blacks could enslave blacks, and Africans could be the agents of a racialized Atlantic slave trade. Othello represents an elite black citizen of this early modern world with this kind of agency. Understanding the roles of elites, that is, creoles and free blacks and their unique relationship in the black Atlantic world gets lost when race is made to essentialize all black people. And it is important to note that among Africans themselves black skin did not create a consciousness of interconnectedness that we associate with the meaning of race today.

The careful parsing and preciosity of argument that Bassi engages in regarding race and racism and literary criticism would simply annoy historian Ibram X. Kendi.

Kendi's, "definition of a racist idea is a simple one: it is any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way."¹⁹⁵

That is not a very high bar any way you look at it. And, in truth, it is a standard that has existed time out of mind – or at least for the five hundred years Europeans developed a trade in bringing black captives out of Africa. And the world has experienced the transformational consequences ever since.

And there you have it: a catalogue of five centuries of racist thought.

In his new book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2016), an intellectual history of prejudice, Kendi writes: "So many prominent Americans, many of whom we celebrate for their progressive ideas and activism, many of

whom had very good intentions, subscribed to assimilationist thinking that has also served up racist beliefs about Black inferiority.” Those that did so included black Americans like W.E.B. Dubois, and Frederick Douglass, both iconic activists. Also included is the ardent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.¹⁹⁶ Frankly, it is hard to find anyone who has not at some point succumbed to this way of thinking. It is a nuanced way of thinking that entrapped the well-intentioned without their knowing it.

Thus Garrison and other assimilationists “refused to define their own assimilationist ideas of Black behavioral inferiority as racist,” Kendi contends. “These assimilationists defined only segregationist ideas of Black biological inferiority as racist.” Yet both are racist visions by Kendi’s definition. As one reviewer notes, “by promoting freedom but forgetting equality; by placing the burden of combating racism on black shoulders, not white ones; by implicitly accepting notions of inferiority, no matter how righteous their indignation; by conflating anti-racist claims and racist fears in an effort to claim a moralizing middle ground,” they were complicit in perpetuating the inequality they sought to end.¹⁹⁷

And that is not where the paradoxical ends. During the time Kendi was writing his book, a black president was in office, but Trayvon Martin was shot dead by a vigilante; Rekia Boyd, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice were all killed at the hands of the police; Sandra Bland died in police custody; and the “Charleston nine” were murdered by a white supremacist terrorist.¹⁹⁸

I ask you to consider what Ta-Nahesi Coates writes in *Between the World and Me* (2015), a castigating essay that takes the form of a letter to his son about the realities of being black in America:

Here is what I would like for you to know: In America it is traditional to destroy the

black body – it is heritage.

Coates “letter,” is an excoriating critique of America that reflects his existential need to confront the litany of recent black deaths across the country at the hands of the police. He exposes that embedded in this nation’s history is the perpetual assault against the black body, a cultural practice rooted in slavery.¹⁹⁹

Kendi’s history of racist ideas takes us back to what will become our familiar territory of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when European intellectuals defended the slave trade by arguing that the enslavement of Africans could be rationalized by arguments based on cultural and phenotypical difference and Christian theology. Justifications for modes of black oppression increased in Colonial times and during the early slave-holding Republic. After the Civil War, in order to thwart Reconstruction-era freedoms policies emerged to ensure that the promise of equality would not come to pass. As Kendi writes, “lawmakers justified these new racist policies with racist ideas.” “They proclaimed that the Black codes — which forced Blacks into labor contracts, barred their movement, and regulated their family lives — were meant to restrain them because they were naturally lazy, lawless, and oversexed.”²⁰⁰

Observe that racial discrimination is present before it is rationalized in Kendi’s treatise. Like Bethencourt, Kendi believes racial discrimination, is a product of historical self-interest. That expediency comes first. Thus racist ideologies are advanced to justify what is already in practice. The demonization and ignorance that ensue are but symptoms, Kendi argues, not causes. By the late twentieth century, prejudice is couched in coded rhetoric: “law and order” or “war on drugs” or “tough on crime” became the acceptable euphemisms. And Dr. King’s famous arc of history, sadly, bent away from justice.²⁰¹

During his presidency, Barack Obama often commented that race relations in America

have gotten better, even if there is still a long way to go. Kendi disagrees: “With every civil rights victory and failure, this line of reasoning became the standard past-future declaration of assimilationists ... They purposefully sidestepped the present reality of racism.”²⁰²

Kendi does not spare himself in his analysis. To his enormous credit, he acknowledges that before turning his attention to racism as a topic, he unwittingly harbored prejudice against his own people. “Fooled by racist ideas,” he confesses, “I did not fully realize that the only thing wrong with Black people is that we think something is wrong with Black people.”²⁰³

Through the Lens of Transnationalism and More

It is my hope that the *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life* will redefine the critical race discourse around *Othello* by looking at historical developments of the past 500 years – early modern, to modern, to postmodern – with a fresh eye: the world through the lens of Shakespeare’s Othello himself, as an early modern transnational traveler. This project furthers the position that Robin Davis Gribbran Kelley asserted when he served as Chair of African American Studies at UCLA, “we have yet to fully grasp the idea that African American Studies is central, not peripheral, to our mission as knowledge producers.”²⁰⁴ This because one of the ways African American studies and African Diaspora studies can contribute to knowledge production is in the area of transnational history, especially where this relates to internationalizing Colonial American and US history.

In other respects, transnational history is a politically correct way of dusting of diplomatic history and giving new life to the discredited field of the history of empires. It allows for considerations of social and cultural histories across borders. Because as Linda

Lindsey points out in *Perspectives on History, The News Magazine of the American Historical Association* (2012): “Transnational histories offer a range of insights—about mobility, the relationships that link and transcend political entities, the development of networks and states, the particularities of culture, and more—that are often overlooked in nation-bound studies.”²⁰⁵

The Biography of Othello – an exploration of a black man’s cultural identity – transpires in a global, that is, a transnational and transcultural context. The leap from the national to the transnational and transoceanic is influential in the construction of the black Atlantic and Atlantic world interpretive paradigms. It connotes a shift away from the European Master Narrative of conquest by inserting reflexively overlooked aspects of the African and African Diaspora experience into the grand scheme of thought-making in world history. For do keep in mind, the popular narrative is not necessarily the factual narrative. In this I am a scholar of intersecting interests: African American history, the African Diaspora experience, and the world of the black Black Atlantic in their all-encompassing transnationalisms.

As it turns out I am following a trend by creating biography in a transnational context.

Again, I turn to Linda Lindsey for context:

Indeed, many recently published transnational histories are biographical or microhistorical accounts of otherwise unknown people. Rather than highlight abstract processes and aggregates, these studies give us intimate portraits of men and women experiencing and affecting larger-scale political, economic, social, or intellectual transformations. And like the best social histories, they emphasize the dignity and agency of the individual.²⁰⁶

In *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life*, I interrogate the construction of race, showcase the persistence of inequality in our fractious society, and investigate how blackness

or Africanness became a feature in the consciousness of the Western white mind. I look at slavery as foundational to the rise of capitalism and modernity through Enlightenment thinking with all the paradoxes that implies. Othello is the point of orientation between America and the world – America coming to terms with its racist past.

Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched across the pages of history the mighty words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here.

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
“Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963²⁰⁷

On Dramaturgy as Research Methodology / On Dramaturgy and Producing

The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life is a medium for new perspectives on major historical developments, teasing from the past surprises that previous historical interpretation has masked. With my training and professional background in the theater and history, my approach is interdisciplinary. This is a site for students of history and students of literature and the theater to meet. I have been asked what theory I employ. And my answer is don't do a particular theory, per se. I have never been good at orthodoxy – preferring to pick and choose. My historical practice is ecumenical. My relationship to theory, unconventional.

I would have theory function to provide paradigms that structure critical inquiry so that the analysis and interpretation of knowledge and the exigencies of the human condition within private, corporate, cultural, social and political contexts can be systematized in ways that allow for shared conceptual frameworks both within a field of study and across disciplines. In order for theory to fulfill its mission, it must be, by my definition, mutable: it

must be both fluid and dynamic. Theory is, after all, a human construct. To stay on course theory must challenge its own assumptions, it must resist fashion.

In the early modern era, the condition of the Human: situating humanity between divinity the (divine) and bestiality (the non-human) was essential to the concept of foundational identity formation, subjectivity, and personal agency. This interests me.

As for methodology, my approach is dramaturgical. In the world of the theater, a dramaturge is both a historian and a creative interpreter of a script who makes decisions based on careful research into the history of the play's given circumstances, its performance history, the author's biography, and the historical and cultural context within which the play was written and staged. The dramaturge is also concerned with the impact of the history of representation, what the life of the play – its intellectual architecture – has on the real world. The dramaturge is charged with conceptually preparing a play for performance, and I think of this book project as a kind of performance.

The dramaturge is both a historian and a creative interpreter of the text who must make concrete decisions about how ideas can be turned into action on stage. First and foremost, the dramaturge should understand the play itself. That knowledge, which comes from committed and informed study, should be conducted in such a way that the dramaturge comes to the production process with an intimate knowledge of the script and its composition, organization, and progression of action. This requires a mastery of the structures of drama and dramatic action, and a recognition that what they “produce” is dynamic and fluid. From this study of the text the dramaturge determines what will “inform” the interpretation of the plays production. Sometimes referred to as the “concept” for the production. If the play is a classic, such as *Othello*, the dramaturge will make these decisions based on careful research of the

history of the play's performance the author's biography and the historical and cultural context within which the play was written and performed.

The dramaturge will share a particularized "reading" of the text with the director, the production team and the cast. The dramaturge will collect and create background materials to disseminate to the company. The dramaturge will specifically help the actors with questions such as "Who am I?" "Where am I from?" in order to help create a plausible back-story the actors can use to ground their interpretations of the text. It is the dramaturge's job to help all that are involved with the production to understand the work. The dramaturge must be in command of visual materials because the theater is an image driven as well as a text driven art form. The dramaturgy must be able to visualize the production. The dramaturge is ultimately responsible for artistic truth. There is always the tension and danger of live performance when a new interpretation of a time-honored work goes before the public.

The William and Mary Quarterly "Constructs Race," 1997

In 1997, an "unprecedented" special issue of *The William and Mary Quarterly* was published under the title "Constructing Race: Differentiating Peoples in the Early Modern World." It was edited by Michael McGiffert. Describing the contents of the "Constructing Race" issue, McGiffert had this to say in his "Editor's Preface" about the journal's approach:

Its general theme and many of the topics of its articles take it well beyond the bounds of early American history as commonly conceived and practiced in our pages. The articles range across space from the Near East to the Americas by way of Europe and Africa; they travel through time from the eighth century to the eighteenth. For these essays as a group, America is often more the distant object – the terminus ad quem of investigation – than the subject of immediate concern. At the same time, each piece examines cultural work – the western construction of race and racism over time – that had American consequences of incalculable magnitude...²⁰⁸

So we see that in this conversation among scholars conducted in the pages of a journal devoted to colonial American history, America, surprisingly, was not to be privileged. However, given the participants, that is the way the discourse would inevitably lean. But what turned out to be critical was not the “lean” but the “tilt.” The tilt “toward more distant pasts and remoter places” that put an emphasis on “the epochs before Euro-American contact.” What was achieved in this collection of articles was the unmistakable focus on the “transatlantic roots of American culture,” highlighting how America’s history of race and racism began much earlier than the common perception. A perception that generally targets the arrival of “twenty and odd” enslaved Africans to Jamestown in 1619, as the starting point of America’s story of race and slavery.²⁰⁹

Rather, what the “Constructing Race” issue featured, was how the American story of race and slavery unfolded far from her borders and nearly 150 years before the English first planted a colony in the New World on Roanoke Island in 1585. “This breathtaking agenda, as McGiffert notes, “pointed toward roots and origins – toward the medieval or premodern centuries when America still lay beyond the horizon of European consciousness.”

This groundbreaking issue caused much consternation, even with David Brion Davis who wrote the introduction, for its wide-ranging and diverse viewpoints, because taken as a whole the articles were hard for anyone to get a unifying handle on. But on the whole, this experiment in interdisciplinarity and transnationalism was met with great respect and enthusiasm.

The topics addressed were unprecedented:

- cultural and territorial frontiers as arenas for the formation of racism
- experiences of collective and personal encounter in which conceptions

- of self and other are formed and transformed
- emergence of racist discourse and imagery serving structures of domination and exploitation
- literary representations of race and racism
- religious dimensions of racism and racist dimensions of religion
- transactions of race, gender, and sexuality.²¹⁰

For my study of *Othello*, I confess to having consulted every article in this groundbreaking issue – many times. As well as the many wonderful books they spawned. This unusual project of *The William and Mary Quarterly* in its entirety has served as a model for my own interdisciplinary approach and the transnational scope of my and wide-ranging investigation of Othello as a signifying figure in the history of the construction of race. I cannot overestimate the impact of the following set of articles on my consciousness and my sense of scholarly possibilities. And for this reason, I believe it is fitting to list them all. The titles alone reveal the many themes I explore in my own work.

- Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Before Othello*: “Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans,” 19.
- Emily C. Bartels, “Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered,” 45.
- Robin Blackburn, “The Old-World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 65.
- Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical. Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” 103.
- James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 143.
- Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder:’ Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500–1770,” 167.
- Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization,” 193.
- Joyce E. Chaplin, “Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North

America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies,” 229.

These articles taken as a whole are the model for a new American history that grows out of African American studies and is both transnational and cross-disciplinary in its scope. And I am proud to be a part of advancing this new paradigm.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL PRACTICE

Some Views on the History and Historiography of the Presence of Africans in Antiquity, Medieval, and Early Modern Europe and Britain

One reason that New World black cultures appear "counter" to European narratives is that Europe exorcized blackness in order to create its own invented traditions, empires, and fictions of superiority and racial purity.

– T. R. Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, *African Studies Review* (2000) ²¹¹

The fact that Africans were not just living in Tudor parishes but were employed inside the royal court helps us to understand that they were part of the anatomy of that society. However, we tend to have a rather romantic view of our history and, as a result, our perceptions of our identity are unwittingly distorted. This revisionism means that Tudor England is often portrayed as being all white.

– Emma Mason, *BBC History Magazine* (2014) ²¹²

BLACK EUROPE

Black Athena?

No book asserting the African presence in Europe has caused a greater stir than Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987).²¹³ In *Black Athena* Bernal put forth the thesis that the ancient Egyptians were descendants of black Africans whose culture directly and profoundly influenced the flowering of learning of ancient Greece. Ever since Bernal championed the seminal origins of Greek culture in a black African past an entire cottage industry of disputation has emerged led by classicist Mary Lefkowitz author of *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1996).²¹⁴ The title speaks for itself.

Jacques Berlinerblau in his exegesis of the controversy, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (1999),²¹⁵ even-handedly makes the argument for both sides. But more is at stake here than winning an academic argument when critical assumptions about what historians see as truth and evidence challenge cultural hegemony and cast aspersions on the integrity of what is viewed as “the past.”

I cast myself as a scholar who challenges prevailing ideas about race, demonstrating the connections between civilizations in order to restore the presence of Africans and African achievements in our collective memory. Five hundred years of European cultural hegemony over Africa with the racialized Atlantic slave trade at its core presents an inherent inequality that is not easily dispensed with. African studies, genetics, art history and the study of popular drama have provided some promising options to reimagine European historical studies.

Outside the contentious and highly politicized sphere of the European classicists, Africanist Christopher Ehret in his book, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (2002),²¹⁶ has lent credence to Bernal's argument through linguistic evidence that correlates with archaeological data. Ehret is on record as avowedly supporting the premise of *Black Athena*.²¹⁷ I find Ehret's novel research methodology and his reasoning highly persuasive and conclusive.

Furthermore, quite new research in mitochondrial DNA by a team of Spanish scientists has found genetic linkages between peoples of West Africa and ancient Greece, attesting to the notion that the people of ancient Egypt were of sub-Saharan origin:

Greeks share an important part of their genetic pool with sub-Saharan Africans (Ethiopians and west Africans) also supported by Chr 7 Markers. The gene flow from Black Africa to Greece may have occurred in Pharaonic times or when Saharan people emigrated after the present hyperarid conditions were established (5000 years B.C.).²¹⁸

This, although a 2016 study, has made it clear that we cannot make universal assumptions even based on studies of DNA. As this set of researchers notes: "Our analyses reveal that ancient Egyptians shared more ancestry with Near Easterners than present-day Egyptians, who received additional sub-Saharan admixture in more recent times."²¹⁹ These findings have not yet been subjected to wide critique. It will be interesting to see what emerges when they are.

Some of the most accessible early evidence of the presence of Africans in Europe is the depiction of blacks in ancient western art. Employing an unorthodox strategy for a classics professor, the late Frank Snowden of Howard University visited museums around the world documenting through artifacts Greek and Roman encounters with black Africans over many centuries. His resulting books include *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman*

Experience (1970) and *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (1983).²²⁰

But challenges recently have been made to Snowden's assumptions about the ancient world and his contention that the the ancient world was relatively free of color prejudice. Benjamin Isaacs in his book *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (2004)²²¹ takes issue with the long-standing assumption that racism is a modern-day phenomenon. He weaves an intricately detailed argument to make the case for the existence of racism in antiquity, "anticipating ideas that historicists had placed as originating in the eighteenth century."²²²

The Image of the Black in Western Art

On the visual culture front, now available to scholars is an extraordinary multi-volume series (as yet incomplete) of fine art tomes published by the Menil Foundation and Harvard University Press entitled *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.²²³ This entire series has been revised, reprinted and expanded by Harvard University Press and edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., beginning in 2010.²²⁴

The series now has its own website and on it tribute is paid to the patron who first made this project possible:

In the 1960s, as a response to segregation in the United States, the influential art patron Dominique de Menil began a research project and photo archive called The Image of the Black in Western Art. Now, fifty years later ... her mission has been re-invigorated through the collaboration of Harvard University Press and the W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research to present new editions of the coveted five original books, as well as an additional five volumes.²²⁵

I cannot overemphasize the value of the collection of images housed in the pages of this extraordinary series (see, for example, fig. 10, a detail of a 13th century's Domesday

Abbreviato, fig. 11, fig. 12, fig. 13, details of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, and fig. 14, fig. 15, fig. 16, Albert Eckhout's engravings from the 17th century). They speak to the immense value of the fields of art history and visual culture provide to documenting the presence of the African Diaspora in the West. To date, the collection includes the following volumes in multiple parts. The titles alone tell their own story, including the implicit subjectivity of the Western gaze.

- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume I. From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume II. From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery". Part 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume II. From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery". Part 2: Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume III. From the "Age of Discovery" to the Age of Abolition. Part 1: Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume III. From the "Age of Discovery" to the Age of Abolition. Part 2: Europe and the World Beyond*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume III. From the "Age of Discovery" to the Age of Abolition. Part 3: The Eighteenth Century*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume IV. From the American Revolution to World War I. Part 1: Slaves and Liberators*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume IV. From the American Revolution to World War I. Part 2: Black Models and White Myths*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume V. The Twentieth Century. Part 1: The Impact of Africa*
- *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume V. The Twentieth Century. Part 2: The Rise of Black Artists*

The Black Presence in Early Modern European Historiography

The scholarly treatment of Africans in Europe in the Early Modern period is both a narrow field and a fairly recent topic of historical inquiry. This, even though there has been evidence of Africans in Europe since antiquity. It is also a highly controversial field of study that is vexed by a pattern of denial in the ranks of the Academy. It is a closed-door system which has been stubbornly unwilling to look for and therefore credit or acknowledge the contribution of people of African descent to European history and culture.

Two notable studies, exceptions to the standard historiography, and published twenty plus years apart, are critical texts: one a truly groundbreaking synoptic work, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe: A History of Africans in Europe Before* by Hans Debrunner (1979).²²⁶ The other is a treasure trove of invaluable essays, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, edited by T.E. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (2005).²²⁷ This book, the now go-to text, is important for demonstrating that from the mid-fifteenth century onwards that black Africans came regularly to Europe – and in not insignificant numbers – and they were not all enslaved. From ancient times we know that The Mediterranean was “a cross-cultural and inter-ethnic space even before Classical Greece,” that it continued to be so should not be so surprising.²²⁸

As John Thornton writes, “... the quality of the individual contributions is uniformly excellent. Each piece is carefully researched from both manuscript and printed sources, and each is an original contribution to scholarship ... the works gathered together in this fine volume are likely to be cited and quoted for some time to come.”²²⁹ Each one of these chapters stands alone in its own right.

Together the list paints a picture of a whole constructed from the sum of its parts – all

contribute to a European imaginary of the Black presence, as you will see below:

– *Introduction: The Black African presence in Renaissance Europe*, by Kate Lowe;

Part I. Conceptualising Black Africans:

1. *The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, by Kate Lowe;
2. *The image of Africa and the iconography of lip-plated Africans in Pierre Desceliers's World Map of 1550*, by Jean Michel Massing;
3. *Black Africans in Renaissance Spanish literature*, by Jeremy Lawrance;
4. *Washing the Ethiopian white: conceptualising black skin in Renaissance England*, by Anu Korhonen;
5. *Black Africans in Portugal during Cleynaerts's visit (1533–8)*, by Jorge Fonseca;

Part II. Real and Symbolic Black Africans at Court:

6. *Isabella d'Este and black African women*, by Paul H. D. Kaplan;
7. *Images of empire: slaves in the Lisbon household and court of Catherine of Austria*, by Annemarie Jordan;
8. *Christoph Jamnitzer's 'Moor's Head': a late Renaissance drinking vessel*, by Lorenz Seelig;

Part III. The Practicalities of Enslavement and Emancipation:

9. *The trade in black African slaves in fifteenth-century Florence*, by Sergio Tognetti;
10. *'La Casa dels Negres': black African solidarity in late medieval Valencia*, by Debra Blumenthal;
11. *Free and freed black Africans in Granada in the time of the Spanish Renaissance*, by Aurelia Martín Casares;
12. *Black African slaves and freedmen in Portugal during the Renaissance: creating a new pattern of reality*, by Didier Lahon;
13. *The Catholic Church and the pastoral care of black Africans in Renaissance Italy*, by Nelson H. Minnich;

Part IV. Black Africans with European Identities and Profiles:

14. *Race and rulership: Alessandro de' Medici, first Medici duke of Florence, 1529–37*, by John K. Brackett;
15. *Juan Latino and his racial difference*, by Baltasar Fra-Molinero;
16. *Black Africans versus Jews: religious and racial tension in a Portuguese saint's play*, by T. F. Earle.

Please note that this listing of the essays contained in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* includes the biography of a sixteenth-century Medici duke of African descent (fig. 4) and the story of Juan Latino, an Afro-Hispanic poet and scholar who was born a slave and became a professor at the University of Granada, also in the sixteenth century. And since

publication of these essays in 2005, monographs have appeared on each of these elusive figures: *The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici* (2016) by Catherine Fletcher and *The Epic of Juan Latino. Dilemmas of Race and Religion in Renaissance Spain* by Elizabeth R. Wright (2016).²³⁰

Another biography of note is Natalie Zemon Davis in *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (2006), by the eminent historian Natalie Zemon Davis.²³¹ As the reviewer in *The Independent* at the time: “Trickster Travels...” is as much an analytical reading of Leo Africanus's writings, set against the intellectual corpus of his time, as a narrative-driven biography. Davis has created a brilliant book that succeeds in opening up new perspectives, not just on Leo Africanus but also on Mediterranean society at the time.²³²

In presenting this historiographical survey of the field, I would also like to acknowledge the work on Africans in Renaissance Europe by David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450-1850* (2002).²³³ I should also mention as a side note, Ivan Van Sertima, ed. *African Presence in Early Europe* (1985).²³⁴ Kate Lowe's stand-alone articles, which include “Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice,” (2013)²³⁵ and “‘Representing’ Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608,” (2007)²³⁶ have been of great value to me (on black gondoliers in Renaissance Venice, see fig. 8, fig. 9).

Also of note are several regional-specific studies and articles (in order of publication): “The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521” (1973), by John L. Vogt;²³⁷ *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (1980), by William Benjamin Cohen;²³⁸ “Black African Slaves at Valencia, 1482-1516” (1980), by P.E.H. Hair;²³⁹ *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555* (1982), by A. C. de C.

M Saunders,²⁴⁰ *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society*, (2001), by Allison Blakely;²⁴¹ *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (2010), by Debra Blumenthal;²⁴² *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250-1914* (2013), edited by Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann²⁴³; and *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations*, (2016.) by Salvatore Matteo.²⁴⁴

Also worth mentioning is St. Clair Drake's astonishing encyclopedic essay in two volumes, *Black Folk Here and There*, that chronicles the history of the black presence in ancient times and out of Africa (1987 and 1991).²⁴⁵ And sometimes, if no one is writing your history, you have to take it into your own hands: witness Rashidi Runoko's, *Black Star: The African Presence in Early Europe* (2011).²⁴⁶

There is one other publication on the black presence in Early Modern Europe that deserves very special attention. It is the catalogue that accompanied the exquisite exhibition, *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore in 2012, curated by Joneath Spicer.²⁴⁷

What we like to think of as the truth about our world sometimes gets turned on its head when we confront the shock of the unexpected. That is the singular achievement of *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*. What the evidence of art and visual culture (1480s to around 1610) helps to show us, which may come as a surprise to many, is the extent to which Africans connected with the elite society of early modern Mediterranean Europe.

The focus is understandably on individual Africans, which personalizes the experience. The exhibition features the portraiture of African nobility and Africa's

ambassadors and envoys in the clothing of their country, with some and some other black people indistinguishable in dress from the European aristocracy. Some like Alessandro de Medici (fig. 4) and his illegitimate daughter are indeed aristocracy.

And there are examples of exceptional individuals of marked accomplishment born or living in European cultures who overcame prejudice, poverty and even bondage, just like Othello, to rise to the highest levels of society. They are scholars, soldiers, politicians, artists, religious figures and even saints. Witness the magnificent sculpture of Saint Benedict the Moor of Palermo (fig. 17) and Saint Maurice (fig. 18) .

And there are peasants and townspeople going about their lives in settings that although typically European, are now made multicultural through their presence. We also see images and objects that reveal a thriving merchant class alongside laborers and slaves. The enslaved are present in all settings, especially slaves with their masters. There are children there, too. It became quite the fashionable among the European nobility throughout Europe to be painted with beautifully attired, young attractive black pages by their side. Some were enslaved, some were not.²⁴⁸

The Walters exhibition thus demonstrates that through paintings, attitudes and stereotypes involving black skin can be explored. So can the social conditions of European slavery.²⁴⁹

Writing in *The New York Times*, senior critic Holland Cotter had this to say about the Walters show:

Visually the exhibition is a gift, with marvelous things by artists familiar and revered — Dürer, Rubens, Veronese — along with images most of us never knew existed. Together they map a history of art, politics and race that scholars have begun to pay attention to — notably through “The Image of the Black in Western Art,” a multivolume book project edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr. — but that few museums have addressed in full-dress style ...

It was during this period that the convention was introduced of including a black African as one of the three foreign kings in images of the Adoration of the Magi. A beautiful early-16th-century Flemish example and one with, exceptionally, two black figures, tenderly particularized, opens the Walters show on a utopian note...

In reality harmony was rarely associated with Africa in the European mind. Known primarily secondhand from sensationalizing ancient texts, the African continent was often depicted in the Renaissance as a place of freakish beasts and bestial, violence-prone, naturally subject peoples. The attitude found its place in Renaissance decorative objects like oil lamps and door pulls cast in the shape of African heads, and in paintings that routinely included dark-skinned figures as servants or slaves...

Until recently art history has ignored, denied or at best tiptoed around their racial content, just as it has skimmed over the black presence in Europe as a whole. The Walters exhibition not only asserts that presence, but positions it as a contributing factor to a crucial moment in the forming of European cultural identity.²⁵⁰

Another museum exhibition and its attendant museum catalogue, *Black is Beautiful*.

Rubens to Dumas (2008), rounds out my presentation of the latest contributions to documenting the black presence in Renaissance Europe.²⁵¹ This time the museum was in the Netherlands: the De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam, and the curator was Esther Schreuder. It was the first time that Dutch Art Historians looked at how since the Middle Ages, great Dutch painters like Rembrandt and Rubens depicted Africans:

Many great masters turn out to have portrayed black people. The fascination with them will be illustrated in about 135 paintings, drawings and manuscripts from collections here and abroad. *Black is beautiful* presents a remarkable oil study by Rubens, an intimate drawing and etching by Rembrandt, paintings by Jordaens, Mostaert, Breitner, Jan Sluijters, Karl Appel and Marlene Dumas, and beautifully illustrated manuscripts from the late Middle Ages such as the famous Van Maerlant manuscript.

Together these works give an idea of the changing role of black people in Dutch art and culture. They show that for seven centuries black people have been part of Dutch art and history, in which they play an ever more important role. Striking images and new insights take us from the year 1300, via the great masters of the seventeenth century, to contemporary art.²⁵²

In contrast to the many examples in early modern European culture of African's being perceived as brutish or ugly in their blackness in relation to white phenotypic ideals, the Amsterdam exhibition (with its provocative title based in scripture)²⁵³ *Black is Beautiful* was conceived with the purpose of featuring the image of the African in Dutch and Flemish art as "attractive" to European sensibilities. Thus illustrating that images of blackness are vastly more nuanced than we previously have been led to believe. Although this approach proved controversial for the perception that it was promoting a political agenda, nonetheless, as "a micro-study of racial formation,"²⁵⁴ it complements the Baltimore exhibition and the narrative studies of race in early modern Europe being produced by historians.²⁵⁵

It should be evident by now that the story of the black presence in the Renaissance is dependent on image. Images that are supplied from both art history and visual culture that provide us with arresting portrayals of individuals of African ancestry captured from life by artists (some famous) as well as artifacts of popular and material culture created by unknown artisans. That museum practice is also responding to the overlooked presence of black subjects in Western art is yet another reflection of changing trends "testifying to the Renaissance adage that portraiture magically makes the absent present."²⁵⁶

The catalogues from both the Amsterdam exhibition *Black Is Beautiful* (2008) and the Baltimore exhibition *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (2013) add significantly to the project of the *The Image of the Black in Western Art* project, edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., not only pictorially, but through the essays they have commissioned from scholars to elucidate the work. The beauty of these essays are that they are interdisciplinary, so, for example, in *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* we find contributions from historians Kate Lowe and Natalie Zemon Davis. Taken

together with *The Image of the Black in Western Art* project these exhibition catalogues have shifted the paradigm on the integration of art history and visual culture into the historical narrative that tells the story of the presence of Africans in early modern Europe. It is, however, not just a decidedly Eurocentric narrative it is told from the perspective of white subjectivity.

More starkly even than in descriptive writing of the early modern era, such as adventurers' travel narratives, for example, through image, Europeans have constructed race in their subjective observation of Others. The images of the black body rendered as subject through the perception of the white hegemonic gaze leaves us with whiteness as the determinant that has in turn objectified the African Other as a site of fascination, revulsion and desire in ways that intersect and are both "gendering and racializing." Most particularly this applies to such "canonical genres as the portrait and the nude" – which naturally feature both the black male and female body and the black face.²⁵⁷

White subjectivity is a powerful force. "Whiteness is not merely an objective social location entirely independent of itself, but rather, a central feature of subjectivity, or one's lived internal self. Whiteness is learned ...," Linda Martin Alcoff tells us.

Whiteness is ingrained.

Therefore, it should not come as such particularly surprise that Martin A. Berger has concluded in *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (2005) that "something as apparently natural as sight is conditioned by the racial values of society," and even "artworks that contain no narrative links to race ... are more significant for confirming internalized beliefs on race, than they are for selling us on racial values we do not yet own."²⁵⁸

While African American studies and Postcolonial studies are different fields, both share a goal of destabilizing racial hierarchies – in defacing and deforming the white gaze.

Scholarship does indeed overlap in interesting ways between these two fields. Much in the same way Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* analyzes and enumerates the ways in which white selfhood in literary America is further constituted by objectifying 'black' presence, Edward Said's *Orientalism* seeks 'to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.'²⁵⁹

Let us keep us never lose sight of who is in charge of the discourse as we explore the construction of race an identity formation in the early modern world – and what strategies are available to contend with the results. For one, just acknowledging the Eurocentric standard of privilege in whiteness when it comes to modes of critical analysis is a start. Thus, I present *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life* is a mindful, analytical reading of Shakespeare's text set against the intellectual and cultural context of his time.

Like these great master paintings of the Renaissance, *Othello*, too, is a representation of African identity limned in the imaginary of a non-African observer. And like the works of Rembrandt and Reubens it should be recognized for what it is – not rejected for what it is not. *Othello* is a valuable – even brilliant – artefact of the African presence in early modern Europe and it is also limited for being a subjective observation fashioned through the lens of the whiteness of its creator. On face value, for me, this is a recognizable flaw, but not a disqualifier. The question is whether great art can through its obdurate genius transcend the particular and give us a universalist perspective on the human condition. I have immersed myself in a life in the arts because I believe this to be so. I must believe this to be so in order for any or all of us to even hope to transcend the essentializing aspects of our unique existence, so that we may strive to go beyond the safe and familiar of our diurnal lives and to

brave to engage with the unfamiliar and the unknown. And as Shakespeare urges us, to “see it feelingly.”²⁶⁰

BLACK BRITAIN

The Meme of the Moor, The Matter of the African Prince

Confused by the term Moor, which is employed by Shakespeare to define Othello, modern readers often assume that Othello is originally from Islamic Spain. But John Florio’s Italian /English Dictionary, *A World of Words* first published in 1598, a near decade before *Othello* was first performed at court in 1604, tells us that the Italians word for Moor, *Moro*, means “a blackmoore.”²⁶¹ This is extremely significant because Shakespeare’s source for *Othello* was a novella, an Italian tale by Cinthio, about a Moor (Il Moro) and his Venetian wife (Desdemona), but it was Shakespeare who filled in the critical information about the Moor’s blackness and sub-Saharan background.

Let’s let Miranda Kaufmann, arguably the leading expert on blacks in early modern England weigh in on the usage of “Moor” in Shakespeare’s canon. Critics still disagree on the subject of Othello’s intended ethnicity.²⁶² The term “Moor” is ambiguous, as it was used in the 16th century to describe both lighter-skinned North Africans and darker-skinned sub-Saharan Africans. In the wake of 9/11, casting Othello as a North African Muslim takes on a new significance. Nonetheless, Othello is not described by Shakespeare as “tawny” – a word used of Cleopatra and the Prince of Morocco – which was used as a qualifier when referring to lighter skin. Instead, his “sooty bosom” would indicate that he had dark skin, like the African servant named Anthony, who Sir Arthur Throckmorton described as “the Moore... of Guinea” when he took him into his household in 1589.²⁶³

Clearly, that Shakespeare was so specific with the designation Moor is a function of the custom of time. Qualifying descriptors for Moor ranged from white to brown or tawny moors, and, of course, black moors. It was only in English that the term blackamoor substituted for Moor unless “Moor” was otherwise designated by another descriptor.²⁶⁴

In Shakespeare’s imagination Othello is no ordinary West African. He is a man of royal descent. A princeling who was captured in battle as a youth and sold into slavery. Othello’s rise to his present position as General of the Venetian armed forces comes after a harrowing and improbable journey. Othello has endured great physical peril that tested his courage. He is a black man of fortitude and stamina who was able to rise out of his bondage to become a leader of men – of white men.

Othello is described as a convert to Christianity, which would support the notion that he came from a West African clan with traditional religious beliefs based in some form of ancestor worship. But the fact that he is a Christian convert has further fueled the view that he has an Islamic past, which is also possible – even as a West African. He could even have had his term as a slave in a West African Muslim household and been forced to convert to and renounce his animist beliefs.

In his article, the “‘Moors’ of West Africa and the beginnings of the Portuguese slave trade” (1994), Kenneth Baxter Wolf takes us on an origins journey on the uses and meaning of the word “Moor” in early modern Europe.²⁶⁵ “‘Moor’ is a complicated term,” Wolf tells us. And that would appear to be an understatement!

It comes from the Latin *maurus*, which in Roman times simply referred to the inhabitants of the province of Mauretania, that is, modern-day Algeria and northeastern Morocco, otherwise known as the Maghrib. In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville derived *maurus* from the Greek *mauros* for “black,” an early instance of what would become a common medieval European association between

mauri and dark skin.

Wolf goes on to explain that the Moor word took on a particular meaning in the eighth century:

However, as a result of the invasions and immigration that, beginning in 711, brought significant numbers of Moroccans across the straits and into Spain, the term *maurus* (and subsequently its romance derivatives, *moro* and *mouro*) became more complex. First of all, there was nothing ethnically uniform about the invaders. There were the Berbers, the indigenous peoples of the Moroccan highlands. Then there were the Arabs who had recently conquered and begun to settle in the Maghrib. Eighth-century Latin sources from Spain were careful to distinguish between *mauri* and *arabes*, but before long the terms became synonymous, and ultimately, by the later Middle Ages, “Moor” had all but eclipsed “Arab” in vernacular usage.

Because we still speak of Moorish Spain today it is easy to see how Othello has often been perceived from the perspective of that he is a North African Arab when his *blackness* comes into question. But as Miranda Kaufmann has pointed out, Shakespeare clearly was making a distinction between “black Othello” and the “tawny” Prince of Morocco – both of which he employed and clearly in their particular usage. Thus demonstrating that to Shakespeare moor meant black unless it was qualified, as with “tawny.” But this notwithstanding, Wolf also tells us our modern-day assumptions about Moorish Spain can lead us astray. This because the migration onto the Iberian Peninsula in the 700s also included sub-Saharan Africans. It was then because of forced migration, otherwise known as the slave trade, that this new ethnic wrinkle was added,

Due to the growing percentage of sub-Saharan blacks among the slave population in Morocco and Granada, the category of ‘Moor’ was stretched to accommodate ‘black Moors.’

At the same time, “Moor” was also complicated by religious factors when

the term ‘Moor’ was saddled with religious connotations, stemming from the simple fact that from 711 on, the Moroccans (and Arabs) who came to Spain as conquerors

and immigrants were Muslims. It was, of course, specifically this religious component of “Moorness” that was used to justify Ibero-Christian hostility toward the Moors in the struggle for peninsular hegemony. As a result of crusade propaganda, the Moors came to be regarded as the quintessential “enemies of the faith.”

This was a critical factor at the moment the Portuguese began their incursion into West Africa in the middle of the fifteenth century.

In the 1480s, the Portuguese were deeply engaged in trade among the Wolof (Jolof) people in the region of the Senegambia.²⁶⁶ The Jolof Empire (c. 1350-1549) was a medieval West African State roughly occupying the region of present day Senegal. What is of particular note is that the nobility were converts to Islam. The Portuguese had first encountered the Wolof (or Jolof) in 1455 when Cadamosto, a Venetian adventurer in the employ of the Infante Dom Henrique of Portugal, better known as Prince Henry the Navigator (fig. 19) and uncle to King John II (João II) (fig. 20), sailed up the Senegambia.²⁶⁷ An important component of Portuguese commerce with the Wolof was the exchange of horses for slaves.²⁶⁸ People who were enslaved as a consequence of circumstance of capture by African slave traders were sold to the Portuguese as “prisoners of war.” There was no notion at the time that these individuals were “natural slaves.”²⁶⁹

Wolf cites the connection between Prince Henry’s evangelizing mission and the concern for “the struggle against Islam with the expeditions.” He reads this meaning into the most cited contemporary source, Zurara’s *Crónica dos feitos de Guiné (The Chronicle of Guinea)*. Thus in Wolf’s view, the Portuguese had a tendency to “Mooricize” all West Africans as a result of their encounter with the Wolof.

This because to the fifteenth-century Portuguese the term was more commonly associated with Muslims rather than with blacks; so when in their early voyages they

encountered a kingdom of black Muslims in their exploration of the sub-Saharan western African coast, “Moor” came to be conflated with West Africans – and thereafter with black Africans. A.C. de C.M. Saunders believes it was in Portuguese best interest to legitimize their claim to a trade monopoly with West Africa to by couching their intent in terms of a conquest of Islam in these territories. Thus it was in the best interest of the Portuguese that the term “Moor” be as fluid as possible in order to assign its value as a signifier – a signifier that enabled dominion – over as much of the region as possible. There were certainly fewer black Muslims than not. So if the Portuguese could appropriate authority over many more people than would strictly apply – simply by liberally calling them Moors – it was clever ruse to a profitable end.²⁷⁰

This is a point that should not be overlooked when a century plus later we are parsing the meaning of the word more in *Othello*. It certainly helps to explain how “Moor” came to mean “blackamoor” in Shakespeare’s England. Which is precisely what Florio’s English entry for “Moor” attests to.

Blacks in British Historiography and Shakespeare Studies

Until fairly recently, the commonly, stubbornly-held denial – not only in the popular consciousness, but, alarmingly, in history books and literary and cultural studies, as well – was that there were no black people in Britain in prior to the post-war influx of 1945.

Contrary to popular belief—and what is reflected in the general historiography of the period—people of African descent were a bona fide feature of society in early modern Britain. I say Britain, advisedly, because Scotland features prominently in the historical record. The

documentary evidence that there was a foundational African presence in Britain in the sixteenth century, albeit lean, is indisputable. It is a record that has been accessible all along in published texts, official state documents and court records, and travel narratives from Tudor voyages of discovery—or rather, trade and exploration—from the period. But it is only over the past fifty-plus years that a select, cross-disciplinary group of scholars and cultural journalists have intrepidly paved the way in bringing salient, reifying details of this forgotten history to light. Literary scholars have forged ahead with many studies on the representation of *blackness* in early modern English drama. There is however much more to explore and uncover to make the origins of Africans in Britain—and the *idea* of Africa in the British consciousness—substantive history to be read from a contemporary perspective.

It is impossible not to conclude that historians of British history woefully, (and, perhaps, willfully if James Walvin is to be believed), have neglected the history of the Anglo-African presence in Britain. Walvin, who has worked diligently to redress this oversight, offers this perspective.

Until the 1970s Black history was not even peripheral to the mainstream of British historiography... Most strikingly, the basic texts lacked all but a passing reference (if even that) to the history of Blacks in this country. This shortcoming was in part a result of a particular world-view and of a distinctive conception of history itself. To historians more concerned with the intricacies of formal British politics, the history of the common people was of relatively little importance, of subject peoples in or from the colonies of even less significance. Those who ruled the state, or were in a position to seek to do so, acted, everyone else was acted upon, and was by implication a 'people without history.'²⁷¹

Walvin further observes, “even among pioneering social historians, the role of immigrant and minority groups was little regarded (Walvin 1992, 229-230). James Sharpe’s extremely influential *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760* (1987), praised as an example of an enlightened new approach, devotes only a couple of paragraphs to the black

experience. And even with so little, Sharpe stands alone among the political and social historians of Tudor and Early Stuart England, the others simply neglect Africans—to say nothing of Afro-Britains—altogether. That is until the founding of the Royal Africa Company in 1660 when slavery enters the political sphere.

And for scholars concerned with trade and British expansion, America, not Africa, has been the overriding focus. The late P.E.H. Hair is one very notable exception who deserves special mention here. Change in the academy comes slowly. Yet it would appear that the focus is shifting towards a 21st century British society that is ready to examine its multicultural past, including its painful history of empire and black slavery. The official tourist website of the City of Bristol now invites visitors to explore “Bristol’s role in the transatlantic slave trade.” The public exhibitions in England associated with the bicentennial of the 1807 act of abolition of slavery were a testament to a raised public consciousness regarding the history of blacks in Britain and contributed to a further raising of public consciousness. Like James Walvin, I both hope for (and hope to contribute to) a “more closely integrated reconstruction of the British historical experience.”²⁷² No longer can the absence of African-descended people from the record be justified by the explanation that there were no Afro-Britons living in early modern England. If we continue to pretend that these people do not exist, it is because we wish that reality to be so.

Peter Fryer’s *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984)²⁷³ was written expressly by Fryer, a journalist, to correct this short-sighted record. And Fryer’s book has been the go-to text for most anyone who has interest in this subject matter looking for a comprehensive survey. Prior to this it was anthropologist Peter Little’s *Negroes in Britain, A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, published in 1972,²⁷⁴ that stood alone. What

Little offered was an introduction to the few facts he could find in the record of evidence of people of African descent in Britain from the Roman era onward.²⁷⁵

Walvin himself contributed two seminal studies. One as editor of *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (1971) and the other as author of *Black and White: The Negro and English Society 1555-1945* (1973).²⁷⁶

In that seventies period that first engaged Walvin, note also must be taken of the important work of Folarin Olawale Shyllon: *Black Slaves in Britain* (1974) and *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (1977).²⁷⁷ And Edward Scobie contributed with *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (1972). In the 80s, David Dabydeen offered *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (1987) (fig.18) **Error! Reference source not found.** and Ron Ramdin came out with *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (1987). Two articles in the popular journal, *History Today* one by Paul Edwards on the "History of Black People in Britain" and one by Ian Duffield, "Black People in Britain: History and the Historians," both of which appeared in the September 9th issue 1981, round out the decade.²⁷⁸

It was not until the 90s that Jahdish Gundara and Ian Duffield edited *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain: From Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (1992). That serious new material was added to these offerings of a comprehensive nature. Paul Edwards' opening essay "The Early African Presence in the British Isles," and Cedric Robinson's, "Black Intellectuals at the British Core: 1920s–1940s," were stand-outs.²⁷⁹ Two other books worth a mentioning also came along in the 90s that addressed the experiences of the Black communities in London are Gretchen Gerzina, *Black England: Life Before Emancipation* (1995), and Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Black in Britain c.1780-1830*

(1996). Rosalyn L. Knutson's article "'A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry.' Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions," (1994) has been of great value to me and many others.

This earnest group of books would barely fill one shelf of a bookcase (I should know), but times have changed. Of late, Walvin observes, there is a "growing recognition" by scholars "that the peoples of Africa played a critical role in shaping post-Columbian development of the Americas. In the process, they also served to transform the well-being of Europe."²⁸⁰

The research on "the presence of Africans in early modern England has remained a subject in its infant stage of studies," still where not long ago there was practically nothing; much, in fact, has been uncovered and more is being unearthed every day.²⁸¹ Much archival research will need to be done if we hope to uncover these lives.

October 10, 2004, *History Today* published another important article on the African presence in Britain. This one was by Marika Sherwood and was entitled "Blacks in Tudor England" and featured recent new archival work that would be the foundation of Imtiaz Habib's truly groundbreaking book, *Black Lives in the English Archives 1500-1677*, which came out in 2007. In *Black Lives* Habib documented an impressive 448 records.²⁸² Much of his data is from the Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section. For several years a team of volunteers conducted an online project that posts listings of Black and Asian people discovered in records held by the Manuscripts Section, which include the Parish register entries from the churches of London since these records were first initiated in 1538. Imtiaz Habib and Marika Sherwood have been instrumental in coordinating this project. With the publication of Habib's *Black Lives*, it is no longer possible to argue that there was no black

presence in Shakespeare London, even if most the records are those of lives lived on the margin.

The Guildhall parish records are now part of the London Metropolitan Archives and the website for the records of black lives in the archives is still accessible at <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/baentries.htm>, but the Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section lists the last entry to this data base as having last been updated September 29, 2009. You will find the entire database as Appendix of this thesis.

Miranda Kaufmann's doctoral dissertation undertaken at Oxford entitled *Africans in Britain 1500-1640* was completed in 2011. And is full of wonderful detail and radical thinking. It is worth included a "Short Abstract" of her work here below to provide a taste of her findings.

This study of Africans in Britain 1500-1640 employs evidence from a wide range of primary sources including parish registers, tax returns, household accounts, wills and court records to challenge the dominant account, which has been overly influenced by the language of Shakespeare's Othello and other contemporary literature. I explain the international context of growing trade and increased diplomatic relations with Africa and a concomitant increased level of contact with Africans in the Atlantic world. I then explore the ways in which Africans might come to Britain. Some travelled via Europe in the entourages of royals, gentlemen or foreign merchants; some came from Africa to train as trade factors and interpreters for English merchants; large numbers arrived as a result of privateering activity in which they were captured from Spanish and Portuguese ships. Once in Britain, they were to be found in every kind of household from those of kings to seamstresses. Some were entirely independent, some poor, though few resorted to crime. They performed a wide range of skilled roles and were remunerated in the same mix of wage, reward and gifts in kind as others. They were accepted into society, into which they were baptized, married and buried. They inter-married with the local population and had children. Africans accused of fornication and men who fathered illegitimate children with African women were punished in the same way as others. The legacy of villeinage coupled with the strong rhetoric of freedom in legal and popular discourse ensured that Africans in Britain were not viewed as slaves in the eyes of the law. Neither were they treated as such. They were paid wages, married, and allowed to testify in court. Those scholars who have sought to place the origins of racial slavery in Elizabethan and early Stuart England must now look elsewhere.

Dr. Kaufmann is currently a senior research fellow at the University of London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies, and I am greatly anticipating the publication of her first book, *Black Tudors*, by Oneworld in Autumn 2017. I enjoy the very active website she keeps on the African presence in early modern Britain and beyond.

A more recent book to note is Onyeka's *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins* (2013).²⁸³ Add to this, Emma Mason's article "The Missing Tudors: black people in 16th-century England," BBC History Magazine (2014). Also add Matthew Steggle's, "New Directions: Othello, the Moor of London: Shakespeare's Black Britons" in *Othello: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Evans (2014).²⁸⁴ This latest contribution from Steggle still begins with these musings: "Had Shakespeare ever meet a Moor? Did he count any black people among his acquaintances, or even in, in the language of a previous generation's prejudice, among his best friends?" These are all questions which we will address in the coming pages.

I am deeply indebted to the exhaustively researched work created in the new millennium by Gustav Ungerer. His output includes, *The Mediterranean Apprenticeship of British Slavery* (2008); "The presence of Africans in Elizabethan England and the performance of Titus Andronicus at Burley-on-the-Hill, 1595/96 (2008); and "Recovering a Black African's Voice in an English Lawsuit: Jacques Francis and the Salvage Operations of the Mary Rose and the Sancta Maria and Sanctus Edwardus, 1545-ca 1550" (2005).

As for primarily source material, the website of The National Archives is just invaluable. And there is, Richard Eden's *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India* (1555), of course, Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations* (1589, 1598-1600); Johannes Leo

Africanus; John Pory, trans. & comp. (1600); and Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrimes* (London, 1625).

A new comprehensive study of the history of blacks in Britain was published in the United States just in February 2017. The book is called *Black and British: A Forgotten History* and it is by David Olusoga an historian and public intellectual and grew out of a television series hosted by Olusoga. Colin Grant, reviewing the book in *The Guardian*, November 17, 2016, had this to say:

Black and British, the new work by Olusoga, comes with the subtitle: *A Forgotten History*. But forgotten by whom? The early black presence in Britain was not so much forgotten as suppressed – well, if not suppressed then at least untold. Even 10 years ago, if such a mainstream work as Olusoga’s had been proposed it might well have been rejected at publishers’ acquisition meetings with the note: “no commercial prospects”. But as Olusoga demonstrates so forcefully in his admirable book, this is a shared history and a reclaiming of a lost past. It builds on the need he felt back in the 1980s for an urgent “uncovering of black British history ... because the present was so contested.”

David Olusoga grew up amid racism in Britain in the 70s and 80s, and he is not shy to talk about it. The premise of his new book is to tell the story of blacks in Britain – from Roman times until the present – as a means to give his fellow black countrymen agency over their identity as Britons. For Olusoga, growing up “black” meant “other” and “black” was unquestionably the opposite of “British” fashion and sport,

In 1986, I came across the book *Staying Power* by the British journalist Peter Fryer. It was, I believe, the first book I ever bought for myself. This history of the black presence in Britain was published in 1984, the year in which my family had been besieged in our home, and it set the racism that had so deeply affected our lives within a historical context. It allowed me to understand my own experiences as part of a longer story and to appreciate that in an age when black men were dying on the floors of police cells, my own encounters with British racism had been relatively mild. For me and for thousands of black and white people who read Fryer’s book, its effect was transformative. Fryer took his readers back through the centuries and introduced us to an enormous pantheon of black historical characters, about whom we had previously known nothing.

Those black Britons have been with me ever since. I have visited their graves and read their letters and memoirs. They have become part of British history and in some cases part of the national curriculum.

Staying Power remains a uniquely important book and anyone who has ever written about black history has found themselves referencing it, quoting from it or seeking out some of the myriad of primary sources it drew together. Fryer's eloquent chapters offer guidance and provide orientation through a complex and fractured history. Although not the first work of black British history, its impact spread further than most, in part because its publication came at a crucial moment, three years after a wave of riots sparked by hostile policing set ablaze black neighborhoods of London, Bristol and Liverpool.

It remains to be seen if Olusoga can rival Peter Fryer for primacy over their shared topic. But what Olusoga has to say about Fryer, speaks to the power of a book to change peoples lives. I too hope to have written a book about a 400-year old fictional character that will change people's lives.

As previously discussed in some depth, a great tradition of "race critics" has developed over this same period among literary scholars that inevitable address the reception and the perception of people of African heritage in Britain – whether they be Afro-Britain or just visitors. In 2008, Emily Bartels, who is best known for *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (also, 2008), published a then state-of-the-field essay foregrounding trends in literary Shakespeare scholarship in relation to race and gender. The article, which surveyed Shakespearean criticism's "'preoccupations' with Shakespeare's representation of 'other' – non-English or non-European – worlds," appeared in the peer-reviewed journal *Literature Compass* under the title "Shakespeare's 'Other' Worlds: The Critical Trek."²⁸⁵ I refer the reader to this article and to the bibliography attached to this study for the many works relating to Shakespeare, race and gender.

And I will give Emily Bartels the last word on the extraordinary contribution Sierra Leonean academic and literary critic Eldred D. Jones made to the critical discourse on Shakespeare and *Othello* by introducing in 1965 Shakespeare's relationship to Africa and "Othello's countrymen" as then overlooked topics for scholars to consider.

Here is what she has to say in her article about Professor Jones' "field-defining" scholarship.²⁸⁶

In 1965, ...when Eldred Jones published *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*, the interest in 'travel, discovery, and foreign trade' took an important turn (vii). In that study, and in *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (1971), which followed, bearing the imprimatur of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Jones introduced actual and textual encounters with Africa into the critical dialogue as a defining event within England. Positioning himself against critics, from Coleridge's era to his own, who 'greatly' 'under-estimated' 'the Elizabethans' knowledge of the continent and peoples of Africa', he insists that the Elizabethans not only read about voyages to Africa but also 'had plenty of opportunity to see Moors and Negroes in England' (*Othello's Countrymen* viii).

In portraying England's relations to Africa as central to an understanding of Shakespeare, Jones not only pressed literature into the realm of history as a maker of cultural taste; he also pressed criticism into the realm of an almost overt, racially motivated politics.

While Jones did not understand England's exoticizing emphasis on Africa's 'strangeness' as ideologically driven, his work nonetheless began to reverse the exclusion of African (and African-American) subjects and scholars from the main stream of Shakespeare studies and to open a space within the academic establishment for discussion of racial differences.

Yet Jones put difference on the table as an historically and culturally specific and not simply an abstract humanist idea.²⁸⁷

As a scholar of this history, I am concerned about gaps in the received historical narrative, the lacunae attending these texts, images and artefacts about Europe and Britain's black presence. As an English writer and as a writer who set his play about an African hero in Venice, Shakespeare touches both early modern white worlds Britain and Europe. One cannot

say that the experience of black people has consciously been written out of European and British history because in the standard historiographic literature they were never considered for inclusion in the first place. You cannot write the history of the African presence in Europe before the twentieth century without taking into account how that history has been written. And why. There is much to overcome. And there is much more work to do. But we must start with having identified the need.

CHAPTER THREE: BIOGRAPHY

Some Exemplary Lives

The African Eve Lives On

...If you trace back the DNA in the maternally inherited mitochondria within our cells, all humans have a theoretical common ancestor. This woman, known as “mitochondrial Eve,” lived between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago in southern Africa. She was not the first human, but every other female lineage eventually had no female offspring, failing to pass on their mitochondrial DNA. As a result, all humans today can trace their mitochondrial DNA back to her.

Within her DNA...existed almost all the genetic variation we see in contemporary humans. Since Eve’s time, different populations of humans have drifted apart genetically, forming the distinct ethnic groups we see today.

...Now a skeleton from around 315 BC, not long after the death of Alexander the Great, has been identified as a member of a previously unknown branch of the human family tree...The man was 50 years old when he died, and...is the closest genetic match for our common female ancestor yet found... The man was 50 years old when he died, and is the first ancient human from sub-Saharan Africa – the cradle of humanity – to have had [his] DNA sequenced.

“He belongs to the earliest diverged lineage – the oldest we know of,” says Vanessa Hayes of the Garvan Institute in Sydney, Australia, who led the work. She says his ancestors diverged from other humans roughly 150,000 years ago...

“This is...very exciting...,” says geneticist David Reich at Harvard University. “It is the first old ancient DNA ever to be convincingly extracted from an African context.”

– Michael Slezak, *New Scientist*, October 8,
2014²⁸⁸

The “Great Man” Theory, et al.

The “Great Man Theory of history, was an idea popularized in the nineteenth century, and is attributed to Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish philosopher and historian. It is a theory of human progress that features the impact of the actions of “great men,” and rests the struggle for human advancement squarely on the shoulder of heroes who have decisive social impact. The Great Man Theory privileges the charismatic individual – be he a force for good or evil – as among the critical players influencing the course of events for all mankind.

The history of the world is but the biography of great men.

– Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1840)²⁸⁹

Herbert Spencer, a Victorian philosopher and sociologist and great man in his own right (like Carlyle himself, of course), pushed back in against the notion of the Great Man as an independent agent influencing the forces of history. Spencer’s countervailing argument said, rather, that is society’s influence on individuals that determines men’s actions. And that they are subject to social forces constructed before their lifetime.

Given a Shakespeare, and what dramas could he have written without the multitudinous traditions of civilized life without the various experiences which, descending to him from the past, gave wealth to his thought, and without the language which a hundred generations had developed and enriched by use?

– Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (1873)²⁹⁰

But in his own lifetime was Shakespeare a great man? He had some local fame, certainly, but he did not enjoy while he was alive the accolades that fellow poet Ben Johnson

credits Shakespeare with in the homage he wrote “To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare” for the posthumous, First Folio (1634).

*Tri'umph, my Britain, thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age but for all time!*

– Ben Johnson, *Shakespeare's First Folio* (1623)²⁹¹

Why for all time? Not because he was born great, but rather because Shakespeare interpreted his age to itself and thus became great.

There is such a disconnect between Shakespeare's humble heritage as the son of a Warwickshire tradesman from the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon and the international celebrity he now enjoys, that it has given rise to the theory that Shakespeare did not write the plays and poems that bear his name.

This disjunction has come to be known as the Shakespeare Authorship Debate and it is predicated on the notion that Shakespeare's works were the product of fellow playwright Christopher Marlowe or another genius of the time Francis. Many have landed on the Earl of Oxford as the more likely candidate to have authored Shakespeare's canon.

Why the dilemma in the first place? Is it lack of historical evidence? Or is something else?

Let's hear opinion from a present day great writer and masterful weaver of early modern historical fiction, Hilary Mantle, who has studied the case. I offer you a passage from her review in *The Guardian*²⁹² of James Shapiro's exhaustive defense of Shakespeare's authorship in his ardently argued *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (2010).²⁹³

There are no letters, James Shapiro says, no diaries, no authenticated portraits except the posthumous. The mystery man is almost 400 years dead, and yet still so powerful that his words can collapse an audience in gales of laughter or make them walk out of the theatre in nauseated shock.

History missed its chances with Shakespeare. His daughter Judith was still alive in 1662, at a time when scholars were beginning to take an interest in his life, but no one collected her testimony. Survivors remembered him: his fellow-actors, his rivals, his sometime collaborators. Ben Jonson laughed at his shaky geography – shipwrecks in Bohemia? He testified to the frantic pace of Will's invention, and said he loved him “on this side idolatry.” But only a few dubious anecdotes are left.²⁹⁴

Nonetheless, Mantel concludes that we know enough “to persuade a reasonable sceptic that there is only one, economical explanation for the plays: Shakespeare wrote them, mostly by himself, sometimes in collaboration.” So what is it, she asks, about Shakespeare that makes so many “insist that the man from Stratford is an imposter, a fraud, a cover for some more illustrious name? Where did the controversy arise? What are its roots, and how did it grow and sustain itself?”

In truth, the answer about why Shakespeare’s authorship has been placed in doubt, is not to be found in the rational evidence but in the irrational perception that Shakespeare was not born rich enough for his destiny.

As Mantel tell us:

It's a tale of snobbery and ignorance, of unhistorical assumptions, of myths about the writing life sometimes fuelled by bestselling authors who ought to know better... The argument from snobbery is basic to the debate and runs roughly as follows: Shakespeare was a glover's son from a provincial town, and therefore not very intelligent. He didn't go to university and had never travelled anywhere, or at least, not that we know. (Gaps in the record are by their nature suspicious, in this worldview.) Since the plays are sophisticated products of a finely tuned and knowledgeable mind, they could only have been written by a courtier with a lofty spirit and superb education, as well as superior experience of life. Step forward Francis Bacon, step forward Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Shapiro concentrates on these claimants, once fashionable; nowadays Marlowe is gaining on them.²⁹⁵

The pretensions of the Baconians, the Marlovians, the Oxfordians, are just that *pretensions*. They are make believe. They are based on the essentializing arguments – all too familiar – that a person of a particular class, race, or gender is limited in their capacity to

achieve above a predetermined status. The famous authorship debate is a product of class-bias in the extreme.

In his essay “The Hero as a Poet. Dante; Shakespeare,” Carlyle glorifies Shakespeare as England’s national poet, and raises him to the stature of a hero, alongside Dante Alighieri, the Father of the Italian language. He even compares Shakespeare to Homer as an equal spokesman of his age. “Hero, Prophet, Poet, – many different names, in different times, and places, do we give to Great Men,” Carlyle tells us, as he honors Shakespeare as the “Hero-Poet” of all time and for all time.²⁹⁶

It may be a surprise to learn that Thomas Carlyle, would be stunned by the hold the Shakespeare Authorship naysayers have on the popular imagination. Carlyle sees Shakespeare almost as a divine intervention to express the spirit of an age: “a man was sent for it, the man Shakspeare:”

Just when that chivalry way of life had reached its last finish, and was on the point of breaking down into slow or swift dissolution, as we now see it everywhere, this other sovereign Poet, with his seeing eye, with his perennial singing voice, was sent to take note of it, to give long-enduring record of it...

Curious enough how, as it were by mere accident, this man came to us. I think always, so great, quiet, complete and self-sufficing is this Shakspeare, had the Warwickshire Squire not prosecuted him for deer-stealing, we had perhaps never heard of him as a Poet! The woods and skies, the rustic Life of Man in Stratford there, had been enough for this man! But indeed that strange outbudding of our whole English Existence, which we call the Elizabethan Era, did not it too come as of its own accord?²⁹⁷

Carlyle sees this as an accident of fate – not an expression of will. Quite different from Spencer’s faith in community traditions and social conditions that would have shaped the poet. Spencer’s view perhaps could be harnessed to give fuel to the those who would deny Shakespeare’s authorship, claiming his background did not give him the education and experience to apprehend his age with an appropriate depth to shape both limn it and dictate its

contours.

But not Carlyle's.

Rather than feel insecure with Shakespeare's humble beginnings as the pathway to greatness, Carlyle celebrates them:

Whatsoever is truly great in him springs up from the *inarticulate* deeps.²⁹⁸ He applauds Shakespeare as a *sui generis* – a man of such stupendous genius that the world may never see his like again. And, the son of a laborer himself, he seems almost to take great delight in the poet's commonness.

Well: this is our poor Warwickshire Peasant, who rose to be Manager of a Playhouse, so that he could live without begging; whom the Earl of Southampton cast some kind glances on; whom Sir Thomas Lucy, many thanks to him, was for sending to the Treadmill! We did not account him a god, like Odin, while he dwelt with us; —on which point there were much to be said. But I will say rather, or repeat: In spite of the sad state Hero-worship now lies in, consider what this Shakespeare has actually become among us. Which Englishman we ever made, in this land of ours, which million of Englishmen, would we not give up rather than the Stratford Peasant? There is no regiment of highest Dignitaries that we would sell him for. He is the grandest thing we have yet done...²⁹⁹

It is wonderfully ironic that Carlyle would even mention the Earl of Southampton in profiling Shakespeare's rise. And later in the piece he also makes the claim that Francis Bacon as an intellect falls short of the Warwickshire peasant. So much for the authorship pretenders!

Even though the Great Man Theory can accommodate the rise of the peasant beyond his class, if he is struck by genius. The great flaw in the thesis are the flaws in the views of a chauvinistic Victorian man: that it obliterates the common people; ignores women; and denies the presence of people of color, and others who do not fit the European norm (even though Carlyle does include the Prophet Muhammad in his pantheon of greats).³⁰⁰

The obvious flaws in The “Great Man” Theory of history meant that it had to go in order to accommodate women (including great women like Elizabeth I), and working-class people and people of color (including great people of color like Barack Obama) who do not fit the history of the Western world’s standard profile of political actors: white, male, privileged.

As David Kelly points out for the modern historian:

Great men and women, of all colours and creeds, for good and ill, can and do change history. The names of those individuals whose character, personality, ideas, beliefs, actions, decisions, and foibles have fundamentally altered or shaped the nature of world events are intuitive testament to Carlyle’s hypothesis.³⁰¹

Kelly suggests that,

if we extract Carlyle’s basic argument from its historical baggage...it is clear that his theory presents us with a compelling interpretation of human history. The simple fact that it has been distorted and abused by evil individuals for evil purposes does not mean we should wholly discard it. In the wrong hands it is dangerous; in the face of sober analysis it is useful.³⁰²

I would agree with Kelly that the lesson is to use the Great Man theory judiciously and in no way rely on Carlyle’s definitions of who or what type of individual can occupy the seat of greatness. For as a public apologist for slavery, he is a completely unreliable source for any kind of fair and balanced treatment of any person of color.³⁰³

There are few, if any, great events in the history of the world that can be understood without understanding the great personalities involved, without realising that every society and state possesses powerful decision-makers and that these decision-makers are real, idiosyncratic people, not faceless automatons.³⁰⁴

Because of need to contend with the lives of everyday people what came to be known as the New Social History emerged and with great energy in the 1960s. It came with an emphasis on “social structures and processes rather than individual actors” and promoted a social-historical perspective.³⁰⁵ It is often referred to as a bottom-up rather than top-down history with an emphasis on race, class, and gender. And is often associated with the

publication of E.P. Thompson's, groundbreaking study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).³⁰⁶

The latest trend in history writing is the "turn" towards the cultural. *The Cultural Turn in U. S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (2008) is a volume of essays that³⁰⁷ were gathered to honor Lawrence W. Levine and now constitute a definitive study. The book is excellent for defining and explaining the 1980s origins of cultural history. As Patrick Hapogian notes:

From a variety of starting points – labour history, intellectual history, social history, political history, and women's history – these historians became dissatisfied with the 'tools of quantitative social science' and sought an analytical register 'more sensitive to the contingencies of individual perception, language, imagery, and day-to-day experience' (p. 16). As one of that number explains, they began to feel dissatisfied with the social historian's emphasis on public life and institutional structures and began instead to seek a more 'experiential component' – 'shared systems of signs or symbolic languages rooted in, and expressive of, social relationships and social experiences' (p. 17). Later, describing other works, the editors argue that 'social history's emphasis on quantitative categories and material conditions had become inadequate for explaining the deep subtleties of human experience and localized meaning-making' (p. 35). The 'new cultural history' addressed these 'blind spots' and emerged as a corrective to the rigid 'determinisms' and 'totalizing logics' of 1970s social science.³⁰⁸

Inevitably the historian must confront the issue of definition: what exactly do we mean by "culture." And as the authors acknowledge, culture as an object of study can mean many things. In a book that acknowledges the work of Lawrence Levine I am drawn to "culture defined as artistic expression (whether of the 'high' or 'low' varieties whose intersections Levine explored)."³⁰⁹

This book, this *Biography of Othello*, is not just about trying to understand the past but is about trying to understand the present through the past. Which is achieved by harnessing a work of artistic expression that gives voice to a subject in a work of drama that is both old and ever renewing itself with both audiences and readers. It is about given voice to people most

people know very little about.

In this history, I am writing with Othello at its core, it is my purpose to bring forward exemplary lives of black people of the Diaspora in Europe and Britain. And that means equally featuring the life of Prince Bemoim, a man of elite status, along with what we know of the Ipswich Man, an unnamed burgher. Thus “exemplary” literally means to me merely examples of as well as figures of consequence.

There is room for greatness and there is a place for the more-humble in these pages. Because candidly, the lives of many black people and certain many women were (and are) lived at the margins of political power and social influence – and are therefore outside the range of what is recorded as political and economic history.

Multicultural Roman Britain

There is recorded evidence of the presence of Africans in Britain since Roman times. Septimius Severus (fig. 22) was a Roman Emperor who was born at Leptis Magna in what is now the Libyan part of the Africa Province in 146 CE and died in England at York in 211 CE. There is also evidence and visual culture. Not only was Septimius Severus born in North Africa, busts and statues of him show him to be phenotypically black, with his signature tight curled hair and beard (see also fig. 104).³¹⁰ And the Black Emperor’s swarthy complexion was much commented upon during his lifetime. The representations of Severus that I have seen are true to form. They include a marble statue on display in the British Museum, with the emperor in military dress, and a magnificent, oversize fully nude, bronze statue in the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia.

There is written evidence that black soldiers accompanied Severus on his military campaign in Britain and were engaged in a defense of Hadrian's Wall. We know this because,

in 1934, in the little Village of Beaumont, on the banks of the River Eden in Cumbria, when an alter stone was found in the foundations of an old cottage during demolition. Carved into it was an inscription dedicated to the god Jupiter. It was written in the stylized and abbreviated Latin that was favoured by the Roman legions, and it recorded that in the middle of the third century at the nearby roman fortress of Aballava, a unit of Aurelian Moors'...probably named in honour of Emperor Marcus Aurelius...had been stationed...The inscription found in Beaumont referenced the names of two Roman emperors, Valerian and Gallienus, which allows historians to establish the approximate date of the inscription, and therefore the presence of the Roman Africans in Britain, as lying between AD 253 and AD 258. The second piece of evidence that connects the Aurelian Moors to Hadrian's wall and the fortress of Aballava is a *Notitia Dignitatum*, a Roman register that lists the officials and dignitaries who visited the region, including a visit by the 'prefect of the numerous [unit] of Aruelian Moors, at Aballava.'³¹¹

As such, it can be safely asserted that there were Africans in Britain before there were English.³¹² Also consider:

When cranial analysis was carried out by the University of Reading's Department of Archeology [on] 200 skulls excavated in York...a number...were found to be of mixed ethnic ancestry.³¹³

For further evidence of the African presence in Roman Britain, I invite you to visit with me another museum. This is the Museum of Yorkshire, in York, northern England. York, the county seat of Yorkshire is not far from where my own maternal grandfather was born, and it is lovely and very historic city. Known as Eboracum in Roman times, York, founded in 71 C.E., was both a military outpost for the empire and a thriving municipality with a robust civilian population. It was eventually designated the capital of Britannia Inferior. Not only is York the burial site of the North-African-born Emperor Septimius Severus, but Constantius I (Constantius Chlorus) later visited York and also perished there in 305 C.E. His son, who became known as Constantine the Great was with his father in York when he died and was

crowned emperor one year later. This, only six years before he converted to Christianity in 312 C.E. The surviving head of a stone statue made contemporaneously on site at York of a youthful Constantine the Great is on display at the Yorkshire Museum.³¹⁴

But if you do visit the Museum of Yorkshire, you will also see an image that is given much greater prominence than even the likeness of an emperor. The image has been reconstructed from the contours of a skull of a woman who lived in York in sometime after the Constantine the Great lived there and is displayed with her skeletal remains. It is also projected on a wall within the museum. This image is a strikingly beautiful portrait of a young woman, phenotypically African. How this black woman came to live in this far outpost of the Roman Empire is no doubt a fascinating story we will never know, but it certainly tells us something about the time and place within which she lived. It is the image of a lady known colloquially as the Ivory Bangle Lady (fig. 23), and her remains have allowed archeologists to establish that well-healed people from across the Roman Empire were living in fourth century C.E. York.

What we have long known about the Ivory Bangle Lady is that she was found buried in the environs of York in 1901. And that she derives her nickname from the ivory and jet bracelets that survived. Also, that she was found wearing earrings, pendants and beads, and with her was discovered a blue glass jug and a mirror. These objects attest to the lady's wealth and elite status. Also lying with her is a piece of bone of great interest for the inscription carved on it. It reads: "Hail, sister, may you live in God," which points to the possibility that she was an early Christian.³¹⁵ One of Christ's earliest converts in the Roman Christian world established by Constantine the Great.

But it was not until research was done by the University of Reading's Department of

Archaeology in 2010, using modern forensic ancestry assessment and isotope (oxygen and strontium) analysis in conjunction with evidence from the items buried with her, that the Ivory Bangle Lady was identified as a person of North African descent – and a woman of stature at that. “The ancestry assessment suggests a mixture of ‘black’ and ‘white’ ancestral traits, and the isotope signature indicates that she may have come from somewhere slightly warmer than the UK.”³¹⁶

Dr. Hella Eckardt, Senior Lecturer at the University of Reading, said this: “Multi-cultural Britain is not just a phenomenon of more modern times. Analysis of the ‘Ivory Bangle Lady’ and others like her, contradicts common popular assumptions about the make up of Roman-British populations as well as the view that African immigrants in Roman Britain were of low status, male and likely to have been slaves.”³¹⁷

And there is evidence that the Ivory Bangle Lady was not an anomaly.

We now have the evidence from 2014 of the human remains of a woman known for the toponym ‘The Beachy Head Lady:’ a woman from sub-Saharan Africa, thought to have lived in East Sussex c. 200 AD. “It seems likely that soon we will have more conclusive evidence that Africans were travelling to Britain long before the arrival of the Romans.”³¹⁸

Experts are not entirely sure how she ended up in Britain, but researchers believe Beachy Head Lady probably grew up in the area and was possibly the wife or mistress of a local official at a nearby Roman villa. Another theory is that she was a merchant trading wares in Europe and chose to settle in the country.

Such chance discoveries are not only enticing they are revelatory of the untold history of blacks in Britain that lies buried in her soil.³¹⁹ When will the next discovery be made?

One Drop or More in the Men of Yorkshire

In 2007, scientists from Leicester University sponsored by The Wellcome Trust announced they had discovered proof that Africans who came to Britain during the Roman era

left behind “a distinct genetic heritage” among an extended family group presently living in Yorkshire. Professor Mark Jobling revealed that men with the surname Revis carried “a rare and highly west African-specific DNA imprint: the A1 group of Y-chromosomes. The Y-chromosome survives passage from father to son, virtually unchanged through generations. “This study has shown what it means to be British is complicated and always has been. Human migration history is very complex, particularly for an island nation such as ours. This study further debunks the idea that there are simple and distinct populations or races.”³²⁰

All of this data on York provides information on the potential circumstances for immigration to this ancient city. And as Dr. Eckardt, points out, it also offers evidence for the establishment and perpetuation of a more multicultural and diverse community than previously understood. Indeed, we must conclude that black British history is also about the interaction between incoming people African descent and the indigenous population, which resulted in intermarriage or mixed relationships that have been present in Britain ever since.

An Ipswich Cold Case

Between the fall of the Roman Empire and the sixteenth century there are scant few confirmable records of Africans in Briton. So a new entry into the log, documented in 2010, is of considerable note. How this find came about is a story in its own right.

In 1992, 2002, and 2006 Suffolk County Council’s archaeology team excavated a development site on the corner of Wolsey Street and Franciscan Way – previously known as Greyfriars.

During the digs a total of 150 individuals were discovered, nine of whom were declared to be of sub-Saharan African origin. One other of the individuals found was a man from North Africa.³²¹

With our present-day obsession with television dramas that rely on forensic science to solve crimes, such as the many iterations of the *CSI* franchise and *Bones*, it is not surprising that someone came up with a reality TV show that would feature the forensic investigation of a box of human skeletal remains. Why not a British producer for the BBC? Along with two colleagues from Dundee University – a facial reconstruction expert, Dr. Caroline Wilkinson, and bone isotope analyst, Dr. Wolfram Meier-Augenstein – Professor Sue Black, OBE, a prominent anatomist and forensic anthropologist, was enlisted for the job. The four-part television series for the BBC 2, *History Cold Case*, features the skeletons of everyday people from across the ages analyzed in exceptional detail.

The series engages the scientists in a literal unpacking and a conceptual unpacking of a different box of bones for each episode. And by the end of each part, the investigative team was to have established who the person was, come up with a theory on how they lived and died, and reconstruct for the viewing audience a model of what the person whose remains were being investigated would have looked like.

The case that interests us is of an aforementioned subject who was excavated from the burial ground of a friary in Ipswich. First it was determined that these were archeological remains, and the remains of a man. Radiocarbon dating of the man's thigh bone told the scientific team that he died between 1190 and 1300. In order to help interpret and make sense of the findings Professor Jim Bolton, a University of London medieval historian and migration expert, was enlisted to assist.

To Prof. Black, our Ipswich specimen “was a man in intractable pain – probably incontinent and most likely paralysed in both legs.” To Professor Wilkinson, “he was a man with a strong jaw-line and a face full of character.” To Professor Meier-Augenstein, a look at

“the chemical composition of the man's bones and teeth using stable isotope analysis told us that he had been born in North Africa.” And further, the anthropology of his skull told the team “he had African traits, but they were not sub-Saharan in origin but those of someone from North Africa... Independent of the stable isotope analysis and skull shape, the man's DNA also located him as coming from North Africa.”

Here was an eleventh century black man buried in a medieval Christian friary in Suffolk. To Professor Bolton, this was “a revelation.” The salient question for him was, “why was an African man in Ipswich in medieval times?” The question I have for him is why is this such surprise? The find confirms what he should have intuited. Prof. Bolton does acknowledge that “there is still a lot to learn about how often or widely people traveled – either within England, Europe, or the wider world – during that period.”³²²

It is very unusual indeed. There is some written evidence of Africans in medieval England but to find skeletons; I have never come across it before.”
Between the fall of Roman Empire and the 15th/16th century, it is very rare to find Africans – very rare.³²³

The scientists were able to determine other evidence about this man that defies conventional wisdom.

From his bones, we know that the man was middle-aged, well-nourished and well-built and ate a balanced diet. From this analysis of his physical constitution, it does not appear that he would have been a slave. His paralysis comes from a spinal abscess, an infection, that, although relatively slow growing, would have affected him quite suddenly by exerting pressure on his spinal cord, and would have confined him to bed. His death would have come in a matter of months – not years.

That he was buried in the friary indicates that he was a Christian. Must he have been a

convert? Common wisdom would place him as born a Muslim, coming from North Africa as he did. But think of the Ivory Bangle Lady, she too was seemingly a Christian. Where and when had the evangelizing occurred for either or both of them?

Our Ipswich man would have come to the friars for treatment. For it was the religious establishments of the day that offered the only medical care available in medieval England. Because he is buried in a single grave, we can assume he was a man of means. The poor were buried in a common grave. If this were the case, his wealth would have provided him with the means to pay for his nursing care in his decline and ultimate death. If he were wealthy, how did he make his living? We can surmise that he might have been a merchant. Ipswich was a trading port, so with his foreign connections by birth he might well have been in the business of imports and exports. Was he a refugee from the Crusades?

The Crusades were a series of religious wars sanctioned by the Catholic Church during the medieval period. They were about Christian men from England joining their Christian counterparts from other European nations to reclaim the Holy Land (embodied in the city of Jerusalem) from Muslims they perceived to be infidel occupiers. The Crusades created both new and renewing contact between Western Europe and the Middle East, dating from the eleventh century through the late thirteenth century. One of the outcomes of the Crusades was that a network of trade routes was established with the Muslim-dominated Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa that resulted in a massive relocation of people.³²⁴ Our African man's presence in Ipswich could well have been as a consequence of that outcome.³²⁵ As Francisco Bethencourt notes:

With this significant displacement of people accompanied by intermittent war religious and ethnic identification became crucial for negotiating daily survival. Phenotype features, forms of dress, and/of hairstyles linked to religious beliefs became

the obvious criteria for identification—the first step in assessment of different peoples. In a dangerous and shifting world, visual stereotypes served to identify threats and help people to feel secure. The projection of permanent psychological features onto different peoples and their descendants was part of the process of building alliances and defining enemies.³²⁶

We can see, therefore, that in this uprooting and displacement, factors and features such as phenotype, modes of attire, and religion became obvious ways to distinguish different peoples each from the other. And an African man in medieval Ipswich, even one from North Africa, would have stood out for the darkness of his skin color among the white complexions of the native English.³²⁷ It was a time when “structures of domination based on racial categories” were being formed. How did this affect Ipswich Man? Perhaps less than might be expected given the racism present in other locales. But in England the lack of critical mass at this time and the absence of a slave system would have allowed for North African Muslim to assimilate – as long as he became a Christian.³²⁸ As a side note I cannot help but be struck by how similar this story of the Ipswich man is to the plot line of the black character, Azeem, played by Morgan Freeman in Kevin Costner’s popular 1991 film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.

It is likely that the Ipswich Man came from modern-day Tunis in North Africa. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Greyfriars monastery where the Ipswich man was buried was built by Robert Tiptoft. Tiptoft was a colleague of Richard de Clare and both men went on a Crusade together in 1270. Payments for their activities during the Crusades are recorded in the Pipe Rolls (papers written in Latin recording expenditure). And in the *Flores Historiarum*, a medieval history, it states De Clare brought ‘four captive Saracens’ with him to England from Tunis in 1272. It may be that the Ipswich Man was one of those four because of De Clare and Tiptoft’s relationship.³²⁹

Did the Ipswich Man have children who would carry his bloodline? Of course, we can never truly know the answer to this and other questions of his life, but the presence of this African man in medieval Ipswich is another chance encounter with what is certainly a far

richer lost history of Afro-Britons. And what of the nine individuals from sub-Saharan Africa also found in the friary burial grounds. When will we know more of their stories? And what of the three black people – identified from tax records – previously known to have lived in Britain that the Ipswich Man predates by 150 years? We need to know their stories as well. But they, too, are just tantalizing samples of a greater presence of Africans in Briton than we will ever know.³³⁰

September 7, 2013, readers of *The Daily Mail* were treated to this news item:³³¹ “The First Black Briton? 1,000-Year-Old Skeleton of African Woman Discovered by Schoolboys in Gloucestershire River.” Well, we know that the paper got it wrong – that this woman’s remains were the oldest of their kind. But it is both curious and significant in our desire to know more of Britain’s multicultural past a little over thirty miles from Shakespeare’s home town of Stratford-upon-Avon “it has been confirmed” that in Fairford “the remains...of a woman from Sub-Saharan Africa and are dated between 896AD and 1025AD,” were found.

Al Andalus

The Moorish conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 C.E. and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate that lasted for 800 years rendered Spain and Portugal unique in the European historical context with respect to Africa. The Moors installed slavery as a normal and enduring institution among the conquered Visigoths. “Islam in fact accepted slavery as an unquestionable part of human organization” although Muslims were forbidden to enslave other freeborn Muslims.³³² Slavery persisted particularly in Islamic Spain where most of the slaves were black Africans brought in from North Africa after transport along the caravan

routes of the sub-Saharan trade. For a definitive account of slavery in medieval Spain and Portugal, see Charles Verlinden's monumental study of slavery in Europe during the Middle Ages: "Péninsule Ibérique," vol. 1 of *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* (1955).

As early as the ninth century a robust trade existed across the Mediterranean (see fig. 24) between European Christendom and Muslim North Africa or the Maghrib, as it was called, supplied by the caravans.

Christian galleys were constantly putting in and out of a dozen or more African ports, of which Massa, Saffi and Tangier on the Atlantic, and Homein, Algiers, Bone and Tunis on the Mediterranean, were among the most important. The Normans of Sicily had been amongst the first in the field, but later Pisans, Genoese, Marseillais and Venetians acquired their respective rights and privileges along the Barbary coast.³³³

Gold was the most prized commodity. The gold from mines of the Western Sudan transported by way of the trans-Saharan route was treasured both by all the peoples of the Mediterranean world. It is not impossible to imagine that a young Prince Henry of Portugal had in mind *Musa Mali, Lord of the Negroes of Guinea* on the Catalan Atlas made for Charles V in 1375 when nearly a century later he risked sending Portuguese caravels (fig. 25) into the vast unknown of the Atlantic to find their way to the peoples of West Africa.³³⁴

Musa Mali

Musa Mali (fig. 26 and fig. 27) or Mansa Musa of the Mandingo people was the ninth king of the great West African Empire of Mali that rose to prominence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries primarily through its trade in gold to the merchants of the Mediterranean world beginning as early as the Roman era. Mansa Musa ruled from 1312 to 1337 over a realm that stretched from the Atlantic coast, bordering modern Senegal to the national

boundaries of present-day Nigeria in the east, extending well into the Sahara Desert of the north. Only the rainforest perimeter – from coastal Liberia to Benin – existed outside his purview.

That Mansa Musa rule marks the apex of the Mali Empire’s achievement and reputation is no doubt due to his visibility. The Malian kings decided to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 accompanied by an enormous retinue that included a contingent of 500 slaves each carrying a staff of gold, visiting Cairo along the way. Throughout the *hajj* the lavish display of gold that accompanied Mansa Musa stunned observers wherever he went. As a pious Muslim, he was committed to acts of largesse, spreading inconceivable amounts of gold throughout Egypt. News of this phenomenon traveled along the commercial intelligence network in the Mediterranean, until it reached the famous guild of Jewish cartographers in the Balearic Islands. The fame of Mansa Musa so persisted that in spite of the fact he was a Muslim “many believed that he was no less a personage than the mythical Prester John.”³³⁵

Prester John³³⁶

Prester John – “a mighty (if possibly schismatical) Christian priest-king” – fascinated the romantic imagination of evangelizing Christian zealots like Portugal’s Prince Henry the Navigator. Enconced in the land of the infidel it was believed that Prester John (fig. 28) could become a strategic ally for the West in a Holy War against the reigning Muslim powers, be they Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, or Moors. The Prester (or The Presbyter) signified the universality of the Christian Church to European believers. His very existence would prove

that the true faith exceeded cultural and geographic diversity by embracing all of humanity, this in an age when intercultural enmity made such a transcendence of difference seem unfeasible.

The Prester was believed to rule a magnificently wealthy kingdom that was once thought to be somewhere in central Asia but had shifted in popular consciousness to a focus on the Coptic Christian African Empire of Ethiopia situated between the Nile and the Red Sea. Ethiopia became “Christianized” as early as the fourth century – a Christian kingdom completely surrounded by Muslim neighbors.³³⁷ “Indeed, in many maps of Africa from the first half of the fifteenth century onwards, Prester John is represented as the principal ruler of Ethiopia.”³³⁸

Beginning around 1306 a few emissaries from Ethiopia reached the royal courts of Europe by way of Jerusalem.³³⁹ The Ethiopian delegation was seeking “a Christian alliance with the ‘King of the Spains,’ to offer him aid against the infidels.”³⁴⁰

Ethiopian travelers coming to Europe in had the advantage of being both Christian by heritage and seen as related to the mythical African king, Prester John. And these strangers abroad in Europe knew how to capitalize on these associations... For two centuries, their ancient Christian heritage and the myth of a fabled eastern king named Prester John allowed the Ethiopians to engage the continent's secular and religious elites as peers. Meanwhile, back home the Ethiopian nobility came to welcome European visitors and at times even co-opted them by arranging mixed marriages and bestowing land rights. The protagonists of this encounter sought and discovered each other in royal palaces, monasteries, and markets throughout the Mediterranean basin, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean littoral, from Lisbon to Jerusalem and from Venice to Goa. Matteo Salvatore's narrative takes the reader on a voyage of This harmony lasted until the Portuguese intervention on the side of the Christian monarchy in the Ethiopian-Adali War. Thereafter, the arrival of the Jesuits at the Horn of Africa turned the mutually beneficial Ethiopian-European encounter into a bitter confrontation over the souls of Ethiopian Christians.³⁴¹

King Caspar

Around 1375, John of Hildesheim established in his text, *Book of the Three Magi*, the key literary basis for the magus, King Caspar as a black Ethiopian. He also promulgated the notion that the Emperor of Ethiopia was heir to all The Three Wiseman because each had died without an heir.³⁴² It is easy to see how myth and reality were conflated, as Europeans began to equate Prester John to the Emperor of Ethiopia, much to the astonishment of the Ethiopian envoys who made their way to the capitals of southern Europe during the late Middle Ages.³⁴³ The second volume of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (in two parts), takes us from “From the Early Christian Era to the ‘Age of Discovery.’”³⁴⁴ These illustrations (such as fig. 29), along with Paul H.D. Kaplan’s *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (1982) attest to the important presence of the image of people of African descent in European Medieval visual culture.

The Negus of Ethiopia

In the late Middle Ages, “the term “Ethiopia,” also spelled “Aethiopia,” was usually used in European sources to identify the mostly unknown world south of the Sahara, whereas the kingdom of Ethiopia, which encompassed much of today’s Ethiopia and Eritrea, was mostly referred to as Abassia in Italian, Abexia in Portuguese and Abyssinia in English: they are all renderings of the Geez [a Semitic language of ancient Ethiopia] “Habasha,” the Ethiopian self-designation used by highland Christians.” The ruler of the Kingdom of Ethiopia was called “the negus.”

–Salvadore Matteo, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations*, (2016)

Kate Lowe has observed that such encounters between Africans and Europeans in the fifteenth century were “crucial” in “the articulation of a whole host of cultural and religious assumptions.”³⁴⁵ Ethiopia with its long history of Christian culture and literacy with a vaunted tradition of “chronicle writing” enjoyed a unique status as an African civilization worthy of European respect by Renaissance Aristotelian standards.³⁴⁶ Class no doubt also made a difference in the respect the Ethiopians experienced at the Vatican and at the courts of European nobility. The Ethiopian ambassadors (fig. 30) were commonly both trusted members of the imperial household and high ranking religious dignitaries who as a courtesy were allowed to dress in the customary religious garb of their culture.³⁴⁷ The extent to which the Ethiopian Emperor was considered an ally is reflected in the strategic dynastic unions that certain European monarchs entertained. In 1428 King Alfonso of Aragon was even considering a “double marriage” with his counterpart the Negus of Ethiopia. By 1452, an envoy from Ethiopia arrived at the court Lisbon, and in 1487 the Portuguese Crown sent an envoy to Ethiopia to negotiate a royal marriage. However, nothing came of any of these plans for matrimonial alliance.³⁴⁸ It is impossible to document whether this was because of a hardening of racial attitudes that accompanied the emergence of Portugal’s Atlantic slave trade mid-century.

Prince Bemoim

Prince Bemoim was a deposed local Wolof ruler looking to strengthen his home position at the mouth of the Senegal river through an alliance with King John II of Portugal. So in 1487, the Wolof monarch wrote to the Portuguese king, enlisting his aid. With his letter

delivered by messenger, Bemoim sweetened his offer by sending along with it “a gift of gold plus one hundred slaves,” a rich reward indeed. For it was trade in gold and slaves that attracted the Portuguese to the Senegambia in the first place. King John was open to the Wolof king’s plea, but he was prohibited by canon law to provide anyone not of the Christian faith with arms.³⁴⁹ The way around this obstacle was, of course, conversion.³⁵⁰

In 1488, King Bemoim travelled to Lisbon to meet with John II for a sojourn of several months. His party included forty people, among them his son and other members of his family, along with a retinue of slaves.³⁵¹ This is not as unusual as it may seem. Diplomatic envoys of nobles and officials were coming from West Africa beginning in the 1470’s.³⁵² But Bemoim was the first sovereign from Africa that John had received. He showed Bemoim uncommon deference when he stood to welcome his African guest. Bemoim reciprocated in returning the honor by kneeling before the Portuguese king, who then raised him to his feet. In every way, the Portuguese monarch treated the African king as a European sovereign head of state.³⁵³

Bemoim impressed the Portuguese court with his skill as a horseman. And his courtesy. From all appearances, it was a successful alliance. We know from John’s Portuguese chronicler Rui de Pina that an oral presentation was delivered by Bemoim at the court of the Portuguese king, which he praised highly for it “did not appear as from the mouth of a black barbarian but of a Greek prince raised in Athens.” The speaker was very likely to have been Bemoim (Pina 1942, 81). The Portuguese were inclined to judge the African visitors as men of dignity and worthy of the highest respect. But this description actually speaks to the general ambivalence of Europeans in accepting the Africans. Remember, Bemoim was called out for his exceptionalism. Rather an exception to the rule – rather than

the norm. It is an example of color prejudice overcome by individual accomplishment – such as Othello's.

In Bemoim's planned for conversion to Christ, his baptism was the central event of his embassy. Indeed, in the King John's private chamber, the Wolof royal took the name Dom João Bemoim, in obeisance to John (João), as the King and his queen stood as godparents. The ceremony was further signified by the issuing European clothing to the African guest – so that he would be fashioned in the way Greenblatt describes in *Renaissance Self-fashioning* as an assimilated, European nobleman. This was a critical rite of passage in court society. Dressed in the attire of his hosts it was easier to hear the oratory of a black African as that of a Greek prince – even though he spoke through an interpreter. The transformation was accompanied by the assignment of servants to the African royal and his noble party, a European gesture to signify their rank above the common folk.

Bemoim was assigned a coat of arms. In the iconography of heraldry his crest bore a gold cross on a red field with escutcheons of the flag of Portugal rimming its borders.³⁵⁴ For the trip home a he newly christened Dom João Bemoim was outfitted with a force of twenty Portuguese caravels – well-armed militarily and spiritually with weapons of war and conversion – soldiers and missionaries. The 300 Portuguese soldiers on board were commanded by Pero Vaz da Cunha who was tasked with constructing a fort in the Senegal River. Valley, that would also be used as a trading outpost. All on board were priests and friars to undertake an evangelizing mission among the Muslim Wolof.³⁵⁵

Alas, treachery brewed in the party among the Portuguese upon the return voyage. Certainly, the Portuguese were only interested in Prince Bemoim to the extent that he served their own purposes. The Wolof ruler was to be installed back in his homeland as a pawn of the

Portuguese for the purpose of enhancing their chances of acquiring access to the trade in gold through Timbuktu.³⁵⁶ But before the plan was enacted the Portuguese man in charge, Pero, lost confidence in Bemoim as an instrument of this plan when the Portuguese regiment was devastated by illness. Pero had Bemoim executed.³⁵⁷ He then sailed back to Portugal.³⁵⁸

King John was very unhappy with the treatment of Bemoim at the hands of Pero but he never formally investigated his assassination and the murder was never charged. This in spite of the fact that Wolof ruler was now a Christian prince. He had sanctified authority.³⁵⁹ We can but surmise that his Africanness, his Otherness never was erased as a distinguishing debasement in the eyes of certain of the Portuguese of having non-European bloodlines.

But the Portuguese missed a critical opportunity with Prince Bemoim. For in the ensuing years Wolof kings never allowed the Portuguese permission to build a fort on Senegal's Atlantic Coast (that would be a French enterprise, beginning in the seventeenth century.) Rather they relied on trade with the intermittent settlements along the Senegal River Valley where over time Portuguese men contracted in marriages of convenience with local women, who operated with the authority of local commercial agents.³⁶⁰

Prince Bemoim's assassination and King John's inaction in prosecuting the murderers "demonstrates" to Francisco Bethencourt "the tension between the attribution to Bemoim of the European status of a knight and ethnic prejudices against black Africans."³⁶¹

Portrait of a Moor

We have Jan Mostaert's (12" x 8") *Portrait of a Moor* (c. 1525-30) (see fig. 31), now housed at the Rijksmuseum as a representation of a black man wearing the garments of a European gentleman, conforming to the custom of the time.³⁶² We do not know by name who is represented in Mostaert's painting, but given that the artist lived in Malines, which was attached to the Court of the Habsburg court in the Netherlands, it is likely his black subject encountered him there, as Kate Lowe discusses in *The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*.³⁶³ This image of the black African completely received expectation: Kate Lowe as important as any document see from "reading" of the painting:

The black African gazes calmly out to his right; his face is composed and his eyes are steady. He has a moustache and longish beard (accepted as a sign of status and/or virility in both Africa and Europe, but significantly he does not have an ear-ring. In every important respect, except skin colour, this portrait represents the very essence of a /renaissance gentleman or prince, and it turns the notion of black African stereotypes on its head.

This man demands to be judged by European rather than African standards and proclaims his identity in European rather than African terms. He is not a slave, he has no body markings, and he wears no gold jewelry or pearl earrings. He is not laughing, looks anything but lay, drunken or criminal, appears no more sexual than a white European ambassador or courtiers, and is not represented in a typically 'black African' occupation. He wears expensive Spanish sixteenth century-costume—a white undershirt, a read over-garment and a black waistcoat – which was standard dress across Europe. But it is the powerful red colour of his clothes, and the quality of his accoutrements, that mark him out and proclaim his nobility and status. On his head he had an orange-red hat, with a badge, on his hands he wears exquisite, rare cream gloves made of kid leather with their own tassel (gloves like this were fitted and made to order, and were only worn by the nobility and aristocracy), and his sword is tucked into a belt with an elaborate beaded and jeweled purse known as a *faldriquera* or *fartiquera*, was special – a type of gold embroidery on leather or velvet studded with pearls – and it contained a *fleur de lys*, connecting its wearer to the French royal house. The sword hilt is of blackened iron, an is of a type (with a pair of quillons each with a finger-ring) fashionable from about 1465 to about 1510. The hat badge announces that the subject has visited the shrine of pilgrimage church at Our Lady of

Halle outside Brussels (not very far from Malines): the fact that it is crafted in gold indicates that he was an important, rather than a casual, visitor. Even the man's slightly swaggering pose, with his left hand turned back on itself at his hip, betrays his Renaissance (in this case Italian origins), giving him a superior edge. The stance of the sitter, and the style of these clothes and accessories (from four separate European countries or areas), are as much a testament to this black Africans triumphant assimilation of European Renaissance norms as they are of a Habsburg pan-European culture.³⁶⁴

Bemoim might have been he, but he is certainly Othello.

NOTES

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¹⁰⁶ Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh, eds., *Travel Knowledge: European 'Discoveries' in the Early Modern Period*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ See Note 245.

¹⁰⁸ William Shakespeare and John Roach, *Othello: A Tragedy* (London: Printed by and for J. Roach, at the Theatrical Library, Russell-Court, Drury-Lane, 1814).

¹⁰⁹ Michael Thomsen, "The War for Pieces: Wu Ming's 'Altai,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August 3, 2013, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-war-for-pieces-on-wu-mings-altai/>.

¹¹⁰ Lena Cowen Orlin, *Othello: The State of Play* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Ernst A. J. Honigmann (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016); Laurie Maguire, "Othello, Theatre Boundaries, and Audience Cognition," in *Othello: The State of Play*, by Lena Cowen Orlin (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 17–44.

¹¹¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Lame," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (June 1988): 572, doi:10.2307/1868103.

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¹¹³ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹¹⁴ See John David Smith and John C. Inscoe, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: A Southern Historian and His Critics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

¹¹⁵ Smith and Inscoe, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips*.

¹¹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁷ Smith and Inscoe, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips*.

¹¹⁸ Charles Lemert, "The Race of Time: Du Bois and Reconstruction," *Boundary 2* 27 (2000): 215–48.

¹¹⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010).

¹²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹²¹ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, 1988), 12.

¹²² Gyan Prakash, "Orientalism Now," *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995): 209, doi:10.2307/2505621.

¹²³ Emily Bartels, "Shakespeare's 'Other' Worlds: The Critical Trek," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 6 (November 2008): 1111–38, doi:10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00571.x.

¹²⁴ Prakash, "Orientalism Now."

¹²⁵ Bate, *Soul of the Age*, 82.

¹²⁶ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800*, 2. Dr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 176.

¹²⁷ In fact, Othello is a name of Shakespeare's invention with no previous provenance. It is striking that Othello is so nearly an eponym for other.

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¹³⁰ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 43.

¹³¹ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 47, n.12.

¹³² Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 9–11.

¹³³ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1988), 52–53.

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¹³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 97, as quoted in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves On Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3–15.

¹³⁶ Davis, *Slaves On Screen*, 3-15.

¹³⁷ Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* (New York: Classic Books America, 2009).

¹³⁸ Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces*, 3.

¹³⁹ *Stuart Hall Collection: The Origins of Cultural Studies from the Media Education Foundation* (Kanopy, 2014), <http://kanopystreaming.com/node/110708>.

¹⁴⁰ Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other “Other,”* Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 34 (London; New York: Taylor and Francis Group; Routledge, 2017).

¹⁴¹ David Brion Davis wrote these words twenty years ago in the Introduction to *The William and Mary Quarterly*. Davis, “Constructing Race.”

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¹⁴⁴ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas D. Smith, “Aristotle’s Theory of Natural Slavery,” *Phoenix* 37, no. 2 (1983): 109–122, doi:10.2307/1087451.

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¹⁴⁷ Davis, “Constructing Race;” David Brion Davis, “The Culmination of Racial Polarities and Prejudice,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999): 762, doi:10.2307/3125142.

¹⁴⁸ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

¹⁴⁹ James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 143–166, doi:10.2307/2953315. See also, Davis, “Constructing Race.”

¹⁵⁰ Richard Jobson, Charles G Kingsley, and R. Morton Nance, *The Golden Trade; Or, A Discovery Of The River Gambia, And The Golden Trade Of The Aethiopians*, 2010, 112.

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¹⁵² For a history of defining racial difference that includes the African American perspective see, Robert V. Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology* (Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon, 2004).

¹⁵³ Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6.

¹⁵⁴ For the full account of this groundbreaking research study, written by the lead investigator, see L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples and Languages*, trans. Mark Seielstad (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Henry Louis Gates, *“Race,” Writing, and Difference* (Chicago [Ill.]; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁵⁶ Gates, *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Fredrickson, “America’s Caste System.”

¹⁵⁸ Fredrickson, “America’s Caste System.”

¹⁵⁹ Fredrickson, “America’s Caste System.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibram X. Kendi in his forthright new book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2017).

¹⁶¹ Angela Onwuachi-Willig, “Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 2016, sec. The Opinion Pages, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/16/how-fluid-is-racial-identity/race-and-racial-identity-are-social-constructs?mcubz=0>.

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¹⁶³ Davis, “Constructing Race.”

¹⁶⁴ In a spate of books about early slavery, the volumes below take up the work pioneered by Winthrop Jordan and David Brion Davis to see how slavery and prejudice toward blacks were embedded in western European and then American culture. The shift away from the nineteenth century is evidence of the maturation of the field, in which origins of the peculiar institution and its global dimensions are of greater interest because they are still less understood than the forms of slavery which were dismantled during and after the Civil War. But this shift toward the early-modern period probably also represents a different generation's examination of slavery. During the era of the civil rights movement, comprehension of the racism that had survived the Civil War seemed to support an ideal of the radical transformation of American society toward racial equality. Now, because that transformation has not entirely been achieved, scholars are looking more carefully at the early history of slavery, in order to understand why racial inequality may be so persistent. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge (Massachusetts); London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440 - 1870*, 1. Touchstone ed., A Touchstone Book (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999); Robin

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¹⁶⁵ Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop*, 1st ed., *Signs of Race* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

¹⁶⁷ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Other recent books that also look to tracing racisms to earlier origins are Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁹ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

¹⁷⁰ Bethencourt, *Racisms*

¹⁷¹ Bethencourt, *Racisms*

¹⁷² Bethencourt, *Racisms*

¹⁷³ Shaul Bassi, *Shakespeare's Italy & Italy's Shakespeare: Place, "Race," Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 27.

¹⁷⁴ Bassi, *Shakespeare's Italy*, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama*.

¹⁷⁶ Bassi, *Shakespeare's Italy & Italy's Shakespeare*, 24.

¹⁷⁷ Shaul Bassi, "Part I: Race, Iago's Race, Shakespeare's Ethnicities," in *Shakespeare's Italy & Italy's Shakespeare: Place, "Race," Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 27–28.

¹⁷⁸ Bassi, *Race, Iago's Race*.

¹⁷⁹ Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3. As quoted in Bassi, "Part I Race, Iago's Race, Shakespeare's Ethnicities," 25.

¹⁸⁰ Bassi, "Part I Race, Iago's Race, Shakespeare's Ethnicities."

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- ¹⁸² Bassi, “Part I Race, Iago’s Race, Shakespeare’s Ethnicities.”
- ¹⁸³ Bassi, “Part I Race, Iago’s Race, Shakespeare’s Ethnicities,” 27–28.
- ¹⁸⁴ Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 39.
- ¹⁸⁵ Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 30.
- ¹⁸⁶ Theodore William Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 1:27.
- ¹⁸⁷ Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 32.
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- ¹⁸⁹ Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 39.
- ¹⁹⁰ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.
- ¹⁹¹ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.
- ¹⁹² Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 39.
- ¹⁹³ Bassi, *Shakespeare’s Italy & Italy’s Shakespeare*, 27–28.
- ¹⁹⁴ Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.
- ¹⁹⁵ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*.
- ¹⁹⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*.
- ¹⁹⁷ Carlos Lozada, “The Racism of Good Intentions – Review of ‘Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America’ by Ibram X. Kendi and ‘Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation’ by Nicholas Guyatt,” *Washington Post*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/book-party/wp/2016/04/15/the-racism-of-good-intentions/>.

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³³⁶ Salvadore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*.

³³⁷ Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 106.

³³⁸ Lowe, “‘Representing Africa,’” 106.

³³⁹ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 20; Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 108.

³⁴⁰ John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1998), 25.

³⁴¹ Excerpt from publisher’s website, Matteo Salvatore and Routledge.com, “The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555 (Hardback),” Text, *Routledge.Com*, accessed August 28, 2017, <https://www.routledge.com/The-African-Prester-John-and-the-Birth-of-Ethiopian-European-Relations/Salvatore/p/book/9781472418913>.

³⁴² Some considered Prester John the progeny of King Caspar. Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, *Studies in the Fine Arts*, no. 9 (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1985), 114; 226.

³⁴³ “The Prester John myth had important implications for Ethiopian ambassadors in terms of terminology, for they were consistently described in documents and texts as *indiani* or Indians, even though they were known to come from Ethiopia. Ethiopians in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries referred to themselves as *Abissini* or Abyssinians and (of course) never as *indiani*. Perversely, following Greek usage, throughout the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance the Italian and Latin words for Ethiopia and Ethiopians were used as generic terms for sub-Saharan Africa rather than a specific term (and this Latin usage also occurred on occasion in Portugal, so the Congolese in Lisbon are sometimes referred to as Ethiopians. Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 118–119.

³⁴⁴ Bindman, Gates, and Dalton, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.

³⁴⁵ Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 102–3.

³⁴⁶ Lowe, “‘Representing Africa,’” 102-3.

³⁴⁷ It was customary for African ambassadors, Princes and Kings to dress in European finery, especially if they were to be baptized. Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 112.

³⁴⁸ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 25.

³⁴⁹ Michael Ralph, *Forensics of Capital* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

³⁵⁰ Bethencourt, *Racisms*, 83.

³⁵¹ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 12.

³⁵² Peter Russell, “White Kings on Black Kings: Rui de Pina and the Problem of Black African Sovereignty,” in *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343-1490: Chivalry and Crusade from John of Gaunt to Henry the Navigator* (Aldershot [etc.: Variorum, 1995), 151–163.

³⁵³ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 12.

³⁵⁴ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 12.

³⁵⁵ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 12.

³⁵⁶ Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 32–37.

³⁵⁷ Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige*, 41–42.

³⁵⁸ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 12.

³⁵⁹ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*.

³⁶⁰ Ralph, *Forensics of Capital*, 19.

³⁶¹ Bethencourt, *Racisms*.

³⁶² Jan Mostaert, “Rijksmuseum Acquires Unique Renaissance Panel,” *CODART*, July 7, 2005, <https://www.codart.nl/museums/rijksmuseum-acquires-unique-renaissance-panel-by-jan-mostaert/>.

³⁶³ Kate Lowe, “The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and Kate J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44–46.

³⁶⁴ Lowe, “The Stereotyping of Black Africans.”

PART ONE: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 8. Vittore Carpaccio, *The Miracle of the Relic of the Cross at the Ponte di Rialto* (1494). Oil on canvas, 365 × 389 cm (143.7 × 153.1 in). Courtesy of Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.



Figure 9. Detail of figure 8, showing a black gondolier.



Figure 10. *Domesday Abbreviato*, c.1241, England, p.196. Detail of a black man. “The entry for Derbyshire in an abbreviated version of the Domesday Book – the *Domesday Abbreviato* – seems to contain the image of a black man. Detail of a page from a 13th century *Abbreviatio* (abridgement) of Domesday Book. A black man wearing brightly coloured stockings is suspended from the initial letter 'I'. Date: c.1240. TNA Catalogue Reference: E 36/284.” The National Archives Image Library, Kew, London.



Figure 11. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights Triptych* (detail) c. 1490-1500. Oil on oak panel, 205.6 cm x 386 cm. Museo del Prado.



Figure 12. A detail of figure 11, showing black women with peacock.



Figure 13. A detail of figure 11, showing a black woman with an apple.



Figure 14. Albert Eckhout, *African American man*, 1641. Oil on canvas, 273 × 167 cm (107.5 × 65.7 in). Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen.



Figure 15. Albert Eckhout, *African American Woman with Child*, 1641. Oil on canvas, 267 x 178 cm. Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen.



Figure 16. Formerly attributed to Albert Eckhout, *Portrait of the King of Kongo Dom Garcia II*, c. 1640s. New York, Sotheby's.



Figure 17. Attributed to José Montes de Oca, *Saint Benedict of Palermo*, c. 1734. Polychrome and gilt wood, glass. The John R. Van Derlip Fund. Minneapolis Institute of Art. <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/109582/saint-benedict-of-palermo-attributed-to-jose-montes-de-oca>, accessed December, 2017.

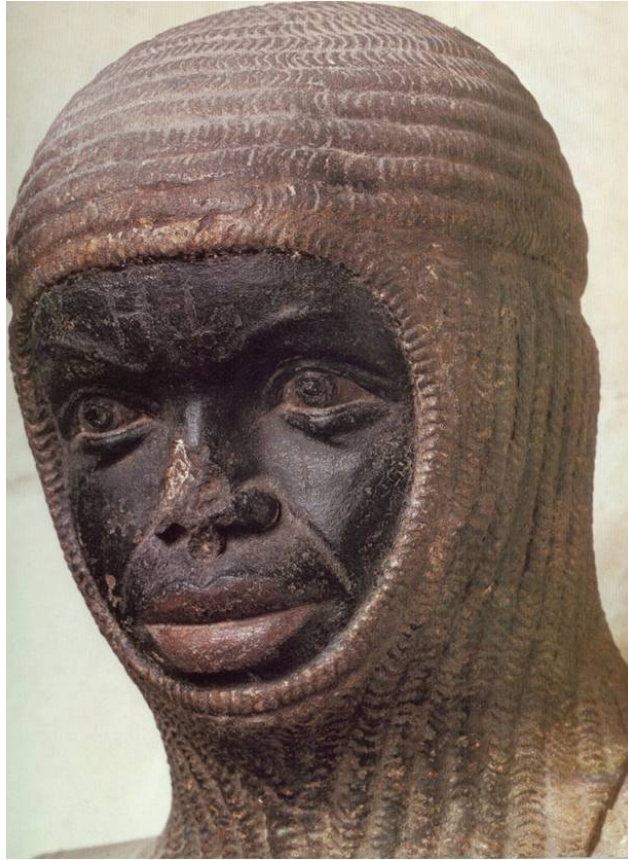


Figure 18. Unknown artist, *Statue of Saint Maurice*, Circa 1240-50. Cathedral of Magdeburg, Germany, next to the grave of Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. The cathedral is named “Cathedral of Saints Catherine and Maurice” after Saint Maurice and Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Photograph by Jeff Bowersox, BlackCentralEurope.com. <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1000-1500/st-maurice-in-magdeburg-ca-1240/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 19. Nuno Gonçalves (1450-1491), *Panels of St. Vincent*, c. 1470. Oil and tempera on oak, 207,2 x 64,2 cm; 207 x 60 cm; 206,4 x 128cm; 206,6 x 60,4cm; 206,5 x 63,1 cm. Detail of panel 3, showing a portrait of Henry, the Navigator. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Portugal.



Figure 20. Unknown artist (attributed to the Portuguese School), *Portrait of John II of Portugal*, c. 1500s. Public Domain.



Figure 21. Cristofano dell'Altissimo, *Portrait of Pope Alexander VI*. c. 1490s. Pope contemporaneous to King Ferdinand I (1458-98). Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Italy.



Figure 22. Unknown author, *Septimius Severus*, c. 193-200 BCE. Marble statue. “Septimius Severus is shown with his characteristic forked beard and tight curled hair and is wearing military dress. The statue is not carved fully in the round, but is flat and unfinished at the back, suggesting that it was part of an architectural design.” The British Museum.



Figure 23. Image showing skull reconstruction of the remains of a Roman woman known as the Ivory Bangle Lady. Copyright Yorkshire Museum and Aaron Watson University. Accessed: <https://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/collections/collections-highlights/ivory-bangle-lady/>, accessed December, 2017.

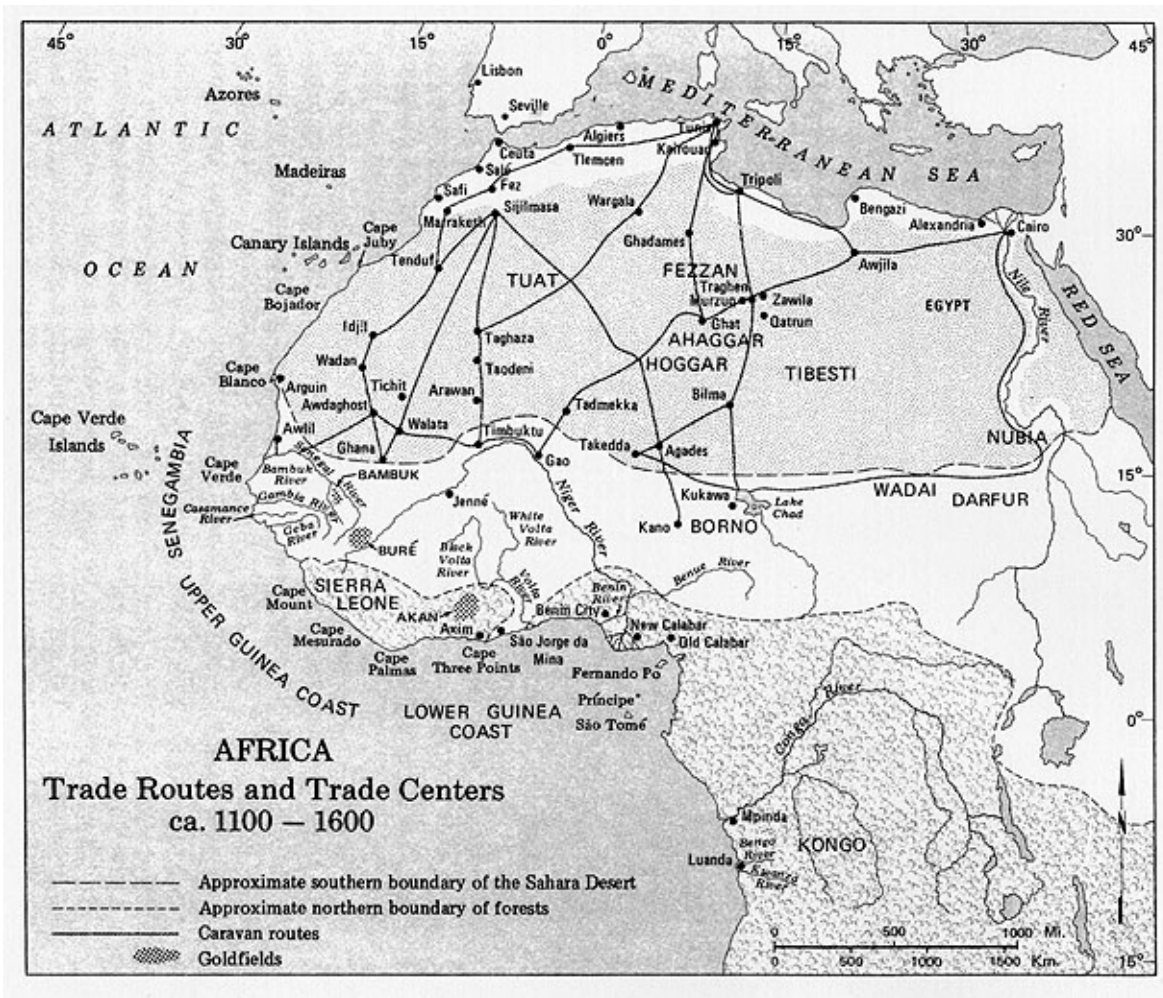


Figure 24. A map showing main African Trade Routes and Centers circa 1100-1600.
<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/43/fd/a5/43fda585c2bfcf1d2bd9f0f5d1821c3e.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.

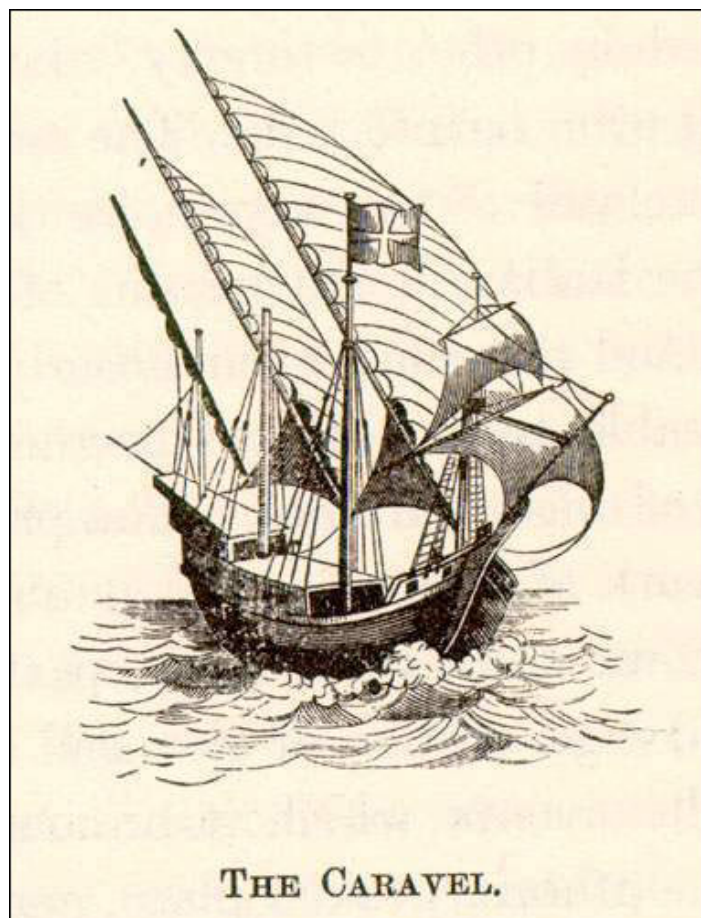


Figure 25. “The Portuguese mariners used caravels, relatively long and narrow vessels with triangular lanteen sails, for their North Atlantic explorations in the 16th century.” (Reproduced from Henry C. Murphy, *The Voyage of Verrazzano: A Chapter in the Early History of Maritime Discovery in America*. (New York: 1875). <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/portuguese.php>, accessed December, 2017.

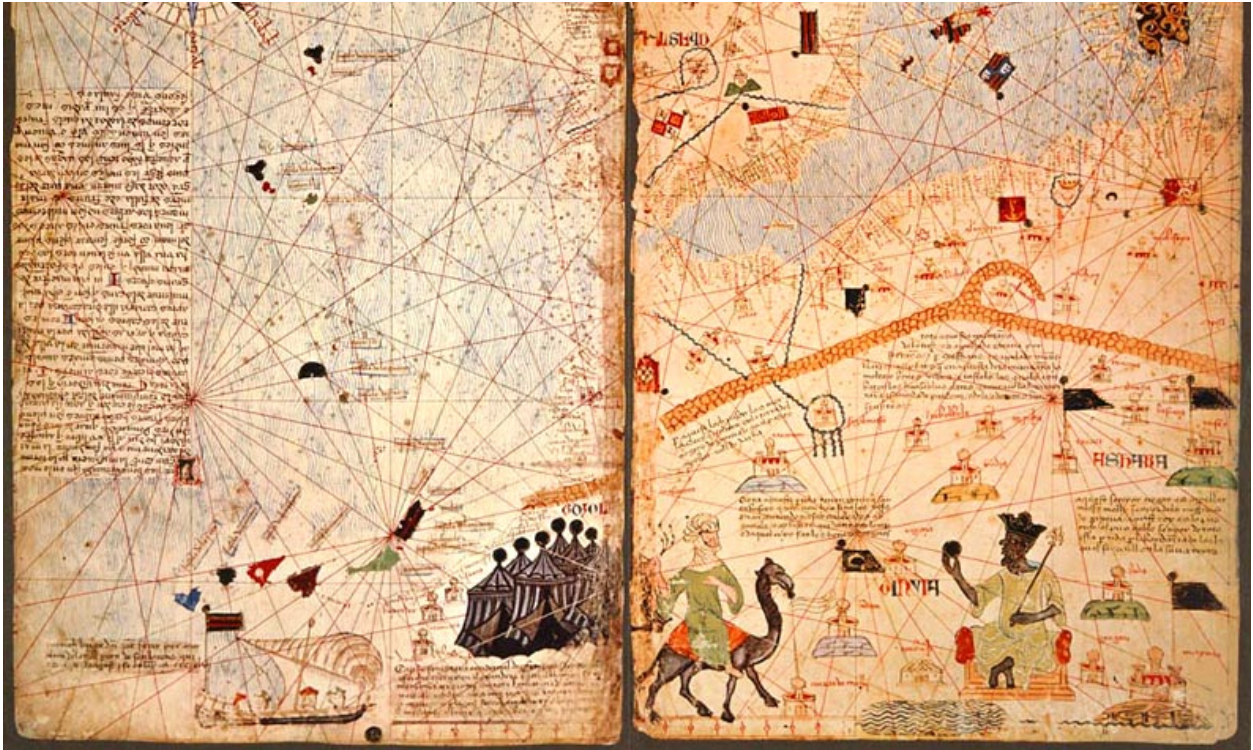


Figure 26. Attributed to Abraham Cresques, *Catalan Atlas Sheet 6*, 1375. Sheet showing Mansa Musa (1312-1337), King of Mali, seated on his throne; facing him is a Tuareg on his camel). Biblioth que Nationale de France.



Figure 27. Detail of fig. 26, showing Mansa Musa sitting on a throne and holding a gold coin.



Figure 28. Diogo Homem, *Queen Mary's Atlas*, 1558. Image of Prester John, enthroned, in a map of East Africa. Add. 5415 A, folio 15 verso. British Library.



Figure 29. Albrecht Dürer, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1504. Oil on wood, 100 x 114 cm. Painting showing a Veronese Black Magus. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, and Web Gallery of Art.



Figure 30. Attributed to Raffaello Schiaminossi, *Portrait of Don Antonio Manuele de Funta, Maquis of Ne-Vunda, Ambassador of the King of the Congo to the Pope*, c. 1608. Baltimore Museum of Art.



Figure 31. Jan Jansz Mostaert, *Portrait of an African Man*, c. 1525-1530. Oil on panel, 30.8 cm × 21.2 cm. Rijksmuseum, Netherlands.

PART TWO: OTHELLO'S 'BLACK ATLANTIC' WORLD

**CHAPTER FOUR
EUROPE ON THE MOVE**

**CHAPTER FIVE
THE PORTUGUESE IN
WEST AFRICA**

**CHAPTER SIX
PRINCE HENRY
THE SLAVETRADER**

**CHAPTER SEVEN
THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE
'Taken by The Insolent Foe'**

**CHAPTER EIGHT
SLAVERY AND MODERNITY**

CHAPTER FOUR: EUROPE ON THE MOVE

*O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!*

– William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1

Westerners' long passivity is more remarkable than their eventual awakening. Now Western civilization is identified with enterprise. Yet for millennia Westerners stared inertly at the sea.

– Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders* (2006)³⁶⁵

In both Europe and Africa, the reorientation of attention toward the Atlantic in the sixteenth century enhanced the position of formerly marginal nations. Just as England gained prominence, so small coastal African states that had previously been on the edge of the great coastal commercial routes developed partnerships with the European newcomers, and all the trades increased in volume.

– Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (2007)³⁶⁶

Othello in the World

*...an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and every where.*

– *Othello* (1.1.136–137)

I am on a mission. I am looking for Othello in his historical and cultural context. I am looking for Othello in order to contest 400 years of interpretive tradition that has written Africa out of his narrative. The map of our trip is dictated by Othello's self-described journey out of early modern black Atlantic Africa and into and throughout the Mediterranean world. It is a checkered path, which often includes sites of memory that intersect with the topography of slavery. When it comes to investigating slavery, much is forgotten. What records we have are the records of slave-owners and slave-traders. The written accounts of former slave Olaudah Equiano and a few others stand in for the multitudes never heard from. It is hard to evoke memory when recollections are unspeakable horrors: inhuman acts ancestors-of-the-complicit as well as culpable governments are invested in forgetting. Memory has to be coaxed from vexed sites – sites, which harbor the drama of times gone by.

History is innately theatrical. We cannot replicate the past; we can only represent it.³⁶⁷

My search for Shakespeare's "black Othello" encompasses the landscapes of early modern life that influenced the creative and symbolic dimensions of the social world of the poet who invented him. It is an era dictated by Europe's expansionist and imperial aspirations, impulses that determined the domination of Africa and the New World. For if America was the prize it was African labor that was the means to exploit that prize. One cannot be understood without the other. The European moral compass which had ended the enslavement

of their own kind long before saw no compunction in imposing bondage on African bodies as a racialized condition in its lust for markets.³⁶⁸ It is the complexity of such a world we must appreciate with its interconnectedness, its hybridity, its incipient modernity in order to follow the trajectory of Othello's dislocation, his metamorphosis from free, to enslaved, to free again.

Othello's travels (as I read Shakespeare) take us from Othello's West African royal origins; to his bondage and itinerancy in Portugal and Spain; to his progress to Italy as a manumitted, Christianized military man; and finally, to Cyprus, his last command. But before we get to the particulars of Othello's journey we must know the history of the places he is a part of and the tenor of the times. Gauging Othello's world also includes the English political and cultural scene; the threat Europe felt from the Ottoman Empire (fig. 32) that Othello is sent to vanquish by the Venetian state; and the great African kingdoms of the Sahel (fig. 33) whose historical significance is largely ignored in the development of Western history. Comparative geography and culture particularize an early modern global remit that blasts the boundaries of a demographically static Medieval past to invoke the antecedents of the modern world as we know it today.³⁶⁹

Othello the traveler is a mediatory figure: his pathway, not merely a migration, but an admission into knowing. He unifies disparate universes.³⁷⁰ Following his early modern narrative arc takes us on a voyage through congeries of intersection more diverse, more multicultural and more transnational than most would suppose. The interaction is so much more than black/white, good/bad, new/old, West/East, division/blending. Rather it is a constantly shifting convergence of people who both devise the world and partake of it.

Othello lives in interstices. The only way really to know him is to locate him in context and engage the layered history and mix of cultures he emerged from. We will explore

the ingress into that matrix – its peoples, its modalities, its economies, its geographies, its beliefs, and its ideologies.

This study allows us to see Othello in his historical and cultural milieu and connect his past to our present by revealing how and why racial identity and difference came to be constructed. It will allow us to understand the world that produced Othello as other.

Let's embark on that journey...

The Atlantic Ambit

Unlikely as it may seem, beginning in the fifteenth century a few small polities, Spain and Portugal especially, began to dominate the world scene, ushering a new order: the Age of European Expansion. This era was characterized by the political hegemony of empires of Europe over non-European peoples through projections of power and monopolies on trade. In the scope of human history, it is an unprecedented new chapter. It is the end of territorial isolation: a time of unmatched intercultural encounter and sustained contact when a process we now call globalization was afoot.³⁷¹ People were on the move through mass intercontinental migration both coerced and voluntary in ways never before seen. It was the making of the modern world.

By 1604, when at royal command Shakespeare's King's Men acted *Othello* at the court of James I, and three years before the founding of Jamestown by the Virginia Company of London, an adjustment in large-scale socioeconomic factors had been underway for well over one hundred years. What had been in flux began to resolve in a move towards a unified world economy around a new course.³⁷² European supremacy and influence – trade routes and lines

of communication – would redirect conclusively from the Mediterranean basin, preeminent since classical antiquity, to the lands on the periphery of the Atlantic Ocean. West Africa and post-Columbian America were inextricably bound in a nexus of commercial, social, cultural and historical interconnectedness. Countless journeys across the water between Europe, Africa and the Americas carried human populations as well as plant, animal and microbial specimens back and forth in a liminal zone of displacement that puts all previous history, biology and culture in question. It was a zone that Britain within a few generations would come to dominate.

The Atlantic system was a vast borderlands wherein European empires engaged each other as well as the native people they encountered in Africa and the Americas – people who not so long ago the gatekeepers of cultural knowledge still called “primitive.”³⁷³ A term that is little more than an anodyne vestige of the early modern usage of savage, meaning uncivil, naked, pagan. “Barbarous,” another pejorative in use that had roots in classical antiquity merely meant one who did not speak Greek – “a distinction between self and other.” But it came to mean a people of a certain technological deficiency, that is, those lacking literacy.³⁷⁴ It then came to be a synonym for savagery. Barbarous people, people devoid of culture and civilization, it was frequently argued in the sixteenth century, were so lost to civility they had no rights: Europeans should feel no compunction at their subjugation. This legacy of disenfranchisement continues today as the descendants of these same people are often denied their roles as cultural actors, for not meeting standards imposed by a dominant culture defined by whiteness.³⁷⁵

In the Atlantic world, the diversity and scope of humanity was breathtaking. And for all that Europeans might be bound in a mutual heritage, a set of common values and religious

belief, this had not prevented a history of internecine rivalry and contentious bloody pitched battle.³⁷⁶ With worlds to conquer the stakes for competing European powers were particularly high. Previous years of virtual cultural sequestration and the Church's censure of man's curiosity and questing nature were thrust aside in the Age of Expansion.³⁷⁷ People who for hundreds of years had stared "inertly at the sea" were on the move.³⁷⁸

The rise of the West was not as cultural critic Pankaj Mishra contends a spontaneous flowering, a "*sui generis efflorescence*."³⁷⁹ It was an epoch of technological advancement (especially sophisticated naval technologies) when Europeans, capitalizing in some cases on Islamic culture's progress in science, had the capacity, the means and the will to kill in order to subjugate non-European lands into commercial monopolies and colonies. Europeans also had the *sang froid* to force one entire constituency of non-European people into a brutalized workforce to fuel their insatiable drive for wealth and power.³⁸⁰ One thing to be determined among the competitors for empire was which Christian nations would be more successful – Catholic or Protestant – at proselytizing their faith to the people they exploited. As Stephen Greenblatt observes, "the Christians' conviction that they possessed an absolute and exclusive religious truth must have played a major part in virtually all of their cultural encounters."³⁸¹

With its universalist ambitions – all men equal in Christ – conversion is at the heart of Christianity. Acquiring new territory was a valuable way to advance Christianity. The Church of Rome from the get-go adopted an evangelizing mission and had a century's long head start with the Portuguese and Spanish over the Dutch and English Protestant empires.

For European states, religious conversion was the only effective means to insure cultural dominance. With baptism came new Christian names, new styles of Western dress, monogamous marriages and nuclear families. Contravening aboriginal peoples belief systems

was a strategy of supremacy no military force or provincial occupation could compete with. Christian conversion gave its acolytes “a new master narrative, conveniently mirrored in existing social and political structures.” But during the Age of Expansion and colonization, be assured, it was never assumed that converts among non-European peoples would acquire the rights of the conquerors or achieve the same degree of grace to which their occupiers believed themselves to be entitled. Christianity imparted an ideology of equality its proponents never had the intention of seeing fulfilled. Any Christian attitudes that leaned towards racial and cultural commensurability were sublimated “in favor of attitudes more congruent with worldwide expansion and inter-European competition for global markets.”³⁸² This is why accepting Christ never jeopardized the slave system. That the enslaved should achieve access to white privilege through conversion was never assumed, even if Heaven was represented as a tantalizing ecumenical afterlife.³⁸³

Nor did the presence of Jesus lessen the terror of Atlantic world exploitation. For Indians of the Americas and the Caribbean, whose fates were determined by the Spanish, the Portuguese, the British, and other Christians – conquest, rapine, and genocide was their lot. For Africans, their destiny was chattel slavery with all the depredations that condition implies: to be bought and sold in the same manner as any other piece of property. In the violent encounter of cultures – the missionary project, mercantile cartels, institutionalized enslavement and forced migration – the enterprise of mass colonization, what Europeans viewed in their acts as a “document of civilization,” should rightly be viewed as a “document of barbarism.”³⁸⁴

The encounter also meant contagion.

Although it was an age when outbreaks of the deadly bubonic plague could still close the public theaters in London and put Shakespeare's company of players out of work for months at a time, Europeans were finally at the winning end of a decimating two-hundred-year epidemic cycle. Over time, European populations had adjusted to a cataclysmically lethal bacillus that had arrived with an infestation carried by fleas on rats that probably was transported into Europe from India.³⁸⁵ But now the expeditionary forces were themselves biological vectors of death from the Old World to the New.

From the first Spanish encroachment into the West Indies, foreign germs were introduced into native human bodies that lacked developed immunities to protect them. This exposure proved more fatal – to the astonishment and dumb luck of the conquerors – than any early modern machinery of war. Pathogens – first (and most fatally) the air-borne, erupted in smallpox, followed by typhus, measles, chicken pox, and influenza (and then yellow fever and malaria brought over by enslaved Africans) – were the unforeseen by products of intercultural encounter. They proved to be the weapons of mass destruction Europe unleashed onto the New World that guaranteed over time the total defeat of all indigenous peoples.³⁸⁶ It was a Holocaust. One hundred years after conquest the native population in the Americas numbered only 10% of the pre-Columbian high estimate of 40 to 112 million people.³⁸⁷

Mounting a successful defense against the Spanish conquistadors was impossible when more than one quarter of the native population was lost to smallpox alone.³⁸⁸ We know that smallpox taxed the strength of the imperial Aztec warriors defending their empire and that their leader, Cuitláhuac, who had been elected Lord of Mexico at the time of his uncle Montezuma's death, succumbed to the disease. With its forces and leadership so ruinously

compromised, the magnificent Mexican metropolis, Tenochtitlán (fig. 34), equal to any city in Europe at the time, was lost to the forces of Hernán Cortés in 1521.³⁸⁹

There it lay! A city as large as Cordova or Seville, entirely within the lake two miles from the mainland: Tenochtilan. Four avenues or entrances led to it, all formed of artificial causeways. Along the most easterly of these, constructed of great beams perfectly hewn and fitted together, and measuring two spears-lengths in width, the Christians advanced. Running in at one side of the city and out at the other this avenue constituted at the same time its principal street. As Cortez drew nearer he saw, right and left, magnificent houses and temples...

– William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*

Evidence shows that a black slave in the party of Cortés' rival conquistador, Pánfilo de Narváez, was the source of the smallpox infection that fueled Cortés success. That black slaves accompanied the Spanish speaks to the ubiquity of enslaved Africans as a part of Spanish society.

The Incas of Peru, the other great New World autochthonous empire, suffered a similar fate from the effects of Spanish infection.³⁹⁰

In New England, a century after the fall of Tenochtitlán (fig. 35), the “Great Dying” of North American Indians from epidemics – commented upon by Puritan John Winthrop – was central to English perception of native peoples.³⁹¹ As Joyce Chaplin observes, the colonists “interpreted the Indians’ susceptibility to sickness as a kind of racial failing.”³⁹² We must get our minds around the paradox of the European perceptions of the Indians of the New World. From the time of Columbus’ first encounter the opportunity to on the one hand look at the Indians as like us but deficient in their culture and religion, which made them prospects for assimilation if converted to Christianity and acculturated or as people not fully human. The latter view accommodated the subjugation and extinction paradigm. The noble savage. There is nuance in this.

As if in retribution for the collective harm done – some measure of justice for their immoderate violation of indigenous people – Europeans returned home with a native American contagion, a sexually transmitted disease, syphilis.³⁹³ After years of controversy, evidence now proves that it was Columbus' own crew members who first brought "The Pox" back with them to Europe. Venereal syphilis struck the Old World in an onslaught of bacterial infection with great suffering: genital chancres, oozing skin ulcers, lesions, rashes, fevers, aching bones and – over years of living with the disease – alopecia (hair loss) and dementia. The only early modern treatment for syphilis – incurable until the discovery of antibiotic penicillin in the twentieth century – was mercury. The element was rubbed on or ingested, and even inhaled as a vapor. But the remedy was as bad as the disease because mercury is toxic. Rumors persist and some noted scholars and medical experts concur that a sybaritic Shakespeare himself may have suffered from, indeed died of, The Pox.³⁹⁴

The *encomienda*, a legal system which gave Spanish soldiers and settlers rights over a tract of land and its native inhabitants, was instituted by Columbus and employed by the Spanish crown thereafter to regulate Native labor in their New World Empire, virtually enslaving the indigenous population, who suffered not only abuse but malnutrition at the hands of the conquerors. But it was not long before the effects of disease, a general inaptness on the part of Indians, and suicide among the captives brought to the edge of despair by their bondage upset plans not only for the Spanish, but the Portuguese, and later the English (and others), to harness Indians for forced field labor.³⁹⁵ This caused Europeans to look to transplant Africans to their colonies in Brazil, the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas to cultivate the crops from which the economic wealth of their plantations – primarily sugar – would derive. The African slave system replaced the *encomienda*.³⁹⁶ Control of this lucrative

trade was licensed through a contract called the *Asiento* (fig. 36), which authorized the importation of slaves from Africa to the New World as a labor force. The *Asiento* was first issued by Spain to Portugal. It was a windfall for its bearer. The initial annual quota was for four thousand enslaved persons per year. As the numbers grew, the ratio of Africans to Europeans increased 7:1. In the 1660s, England's king, Charles II, would be given the *Asiento*, which would seal Shakespeare's homeland's fortunes of empire. Over the centuries between eleven and fourteen million people were forcibly carried to the Americas from Africa. These are numbers that are nearly impossible to grasp.³⁹⁷

A truism of slavery is that the further an enslaved person is removed from his or her birth region the more complete is their transformation into the alien status that justifies their bondage in the eyes of the oppressor.³⁹⁸ Displaced, the Africans' identifying skin color further alienated them as a marker of difference. Whether or not cultural displacement was a determinative strategy, it was certainly useful in establishing the institution of slavery in the New World. West Africans' with their developed resistance to European germs and their tolerance to heat and humidity, living as they did in a climate similarly deleterious to the oppressive plantation sites across the Atlantic, made them an ideal substitute for Indians as a labor force in the American tropics. Ironically, slaves brought their own tropical diseases with them, which further decimated the Indian population.³⁹⁹ The African's mortality rate in the New World proved lower than the European's – who was enervated by the environment – if working conditions were passable. Another thing that contributed to the African's vulnerability to being exploited for slavery was the political fragmentation of the population base, which kept the price per black slave under market.⁴⁰⁰ Ultimately, these factors proved to be a deadly combination, and Africans died early, after all, from being worked to death in the

sugarcane fields of the New World – primarily men, but women too – under extreme conditions that would often kill even the most able bodied persons, which indeed they were.

Colonial planters took great advantage knowing that it was cheaper to replenish field slaves who cut sugarcane with a boatload of replacements on a regular basis rather than to reduce yields and preserve lives. Such expediency for profit with an exploitable and expendable labor force prefigures the capitalist system of outsourcing in today's world economy where the outlook favors short-term gain for some over the general long-term effect for society as a whole.

It also was health concerns that stymied European plans for domination of Africa, but in the obverse: Europeans were now the afflicted. It was the lowly mosquito that did them in. From the European intruder's first venture into West African, it was evident that his susceptibility to deadly tropical agues (especially malaria and yellow fever, unknowingly transferred through the bite of these midge-like flies) and sleeping sickness would prevent him from tolerating anything more than circumscribed forays into the densely forested tropical interior.⁴⁰¹ These biological and ecological impediments were operative until the nineteenth century when epidemiological risk was mitigated by science. It was quinine that finally allowed European colonization of Africa. *Gin and tonic, anyone?*⁴⁰² It is the mosquito that is the vector for the deadly West Nile virus, which has plagued the United States with increasing virulence since 1999.

Improbably, it was tiny, cash-strapped Portugal (approximately one million inhabitants occupying 91,500 square kilometers) that with uncommon precocity pioneered the maritime enterprise of European overseas expansion in the middle of the fifteenth century.⁴⁰³ With West Africa the chosen destination, the Portuguese crews as Guinea pigs (pun intended)

unmasked the health risks there. To avoid deadly exposure to infection they soon gave up on inland penetration. They also gave up on deploying coastal raiding parties when it was discovered that rather than capture slaves – they could profitably buy them. The enterprise of raiding for slaves became one of trading for slaves. The West Africa that the Portuguese engaged from their ships was a countryside already populated with towns and settlements, hooked into to a vast network of trade. Africa was a far more sophisticated and interconnected socio-economic and political world than they (or we) might have imagined.⁴⁰⁴

It did not take the Portuguese long to recognize the wealth to be had in the traffic in human cargos would equal profits from the trade in gold, which they came to West Africa for in the first place. It was their earlier conquest of the Canary Islands that had demonstrated to them the value of slaving. But the West Africans had naval command of their shoreline and rivers; and even if their oar-powered canoes were not sea-faring craft, the Portuguese soon were met with resistance from well-organized and well-armed African military units who proved more than capable of defending their coastal and riverine waters from slave raids. After an initial period of skirmishes and casualties, when the opportunity presented itself to trade for slaves rather than raid for slaves, it was a great boon to the Europeans. That the Portuguese did not have to coerce trade with the Africans was to the good, because, just as conquest was not an option, they did not have the firepower to force the Africans to engage in trade they were unwilling to participate in of their own volition. Fortunately for the Europeans, the coastal West Africans were experienced with inter-regional commerce. The local rulers saw the value in participating with these aspirational new trading partners from across the sea, even if they were wary of the Portuguese. Through mutual self-interest the Portuguese and the West Africans developed a whole new system of diplomatic trade⁴⁰⁵ out

of which Portugal became a mercantile empire and not an empire of conquest and settlement. This is not to deny that the Portuguese resorted to force or the threat of force when necessary to protect their interests and keep the locals inline.⁴⁰⁶ The Africans certainly felt the threat Portuguese power even if they were free of their rule. But the Europeans dependency was such that they had to tread carefully. As historian Philip D. Curtin has pointed out, “It was the mobility of seapower that made it possible for Europeans to build trading–post empires at a time when they were still inferior militarily on land.”⁴⁰⁷

So it was these well–developed local trade alliances with African suppliers that kept Portuguese ships stocked with the range of goods – malagueta pepper, ivory, gold and slaves –they required.⁴⁰⁸ To supply the slave trade, captives were brought from quite long distances to a trading network of entrepôts or factories (*feitorias*) dotted along 1200 miles of the West African coastline. Arguim (Arguin) was the first royal factory established on an island off the coast of present day Mauritania in the 1440s. At the factories of the Gold Coast (present day Ghana), as it was called for its destination in the traffic of this precious ore, the Portuguese built a series of imposing permanent forts to protect their trade monopolies from marauding European rivals (the Castilians in early years).

Erected 1482 as a royal bastion, Saint George of the Mine Castle (*Castelo de São Jorge da Mina*), also known variously as The Mine, Mina, El Mina or Elmina (fig. 37 and fig. 38) was the first permanent stone structure constructed by Europeans south of the Sahara. Back home in Lisbon the original Castle of Saint George (*Castelo de São Jorge*) – named for the patron saint of Portugal – stood guard on a hilltop with historic command of the capital city.

Elmina was the most important base for the Portuguese on the Guinea coast, taking over from Arguim, and had as its special mission the protection of Portugal’s stranglehold on

the gold trade from European rivals when this area was discovered as a significant source.⁴⁰⁹

El Mina's success as an outpost totally depended on a trade agreement with the on-site African ruler, Prince Caramansa, from whom the Portuguese rented the spot. In return, the local African military cooperated to protect the fort from threats from other European powers. Englishmen William Towerson and Henry Strangewyse learned this first-hand – at their peril – in 1557 and 1559 respectively,⁴¹⁰ when they tried to horn in on the Portuguese trading monopoly.

Other prizes of Portugal's fortification system include Elmina's outlying port of Axim (near the present-day border with Ivory Coast) established as an auxiliary gold depot in 1503. Fort Saint Anthony (*São António*) (fig. 39) was constructed there as a permanent stone structure on the promontory in 1515. Between Elmina and Axim, lies the fishing village of Shama where Fort Saint Sebastian (*São Sebastião*) (fig. 40) was built by the Portuguese in the early 1520s (and gold was traded for the first time in 1471). It, too, is a stone edifice. Today they are museums like Elmina and the equally famous Cape Coast Castle. This string of UNESCO World Heritage Monuments dominate the remote tiny coastal villages where few visitors actually venture.⁴¹¹

Like Saint George's Castle the warehouses of the Portuguese forts at Axim and Shama once overflowed with gold, ivory and slaves. As the trade in slaves grew so did the ignominy of Elmina. It became the fulcrum for the trans-Atlantic trafficking in human beings. It was the "sugar boom" that created a corresponding demand for slaves, some 50,000 by 1550.⁴¹² The cellars for storing goods at Elmina became the dungeons for imprisoning blighted captives awaiting passage to a life of bondage.

North of Ghana, beginning around 1445 with Arguim (Arguin) – and island of the coast of present day Mauritania in the bay of Arguin – this factory system became an extremely functional modal for commerce all along the shoreline of West Africa.⁴¹³ From Arguim the system worked because of the coastal Africans' connection to centuries old trading networks that linked them peripherally through the inland empires of Mali and Songhay with its famous outpost of Timbuktu, connecting to the long established trans-Saharan caravan routes through the desert to Mediterranean shores. As veterans of international trade, they West Africans were able to redirect their focus from inland trading depots to an Atlantic market with the Portuguese when they recognized the value of the opportunity presented to have a more direct link to foreign markets.⁴¹⁴ As historian Boubacar Barry alliteratively characterizes the settlement of the Portuguese at Arguim, “it was the first victory of the caravel over the caravan.”⁴¹⁵ Portuguese kings learned to court favor with local rulers by sending gifts to show their esteem and to entice their lasting cooperation. As a result, the evolution from war (where goods were captured) to trade (where goods were freely exchanged) was never the issue in West Africa that it was in the rest of the Atlantic world.⁴¹⁶

A young Genoese sailor named Cristoforo Colombo learned his Atlantic seamanship in this West African market as an apprentice navigator aboard Portuguese caravels sailing to the El Mina coast in the early 1480s.⁴¹⁷ For his historic trans-Atlantic voyage in later life, two of Christopher Columbus' ships, the Niña and the Pinta were lateen or triangular-rigged caravels, (the Santa Maria was a larger cargo vessel, a carrack, with square sails). Today in Palos de la Frontera, the historic town in southwestern Spain from whence Columbus launched his ambitious expedition, it is possible to climb aboard sea-worthy replicas of these three ships. What surprises most is how small they all are, but the caravels are truly lissome vessels for

long ocean-going navigations. How unlikely to the task these old-style sailing ships seem as the intrepid purveyors of European cultural imperialism. Vestiges of that imperialism remain onsite today as the ships are situated as having anchored in the New World among the native Tainos. Statues of naked Indians – men, women, and children are featured going about their daily lives in a reconstructed village. They are depicted as small bodied, lithe, brown people with skin painted in patterns of red and coarse, black, shoulder-length hair. It is a disconcerting scene.

It is usually forgotten that because of his early involvement in Portuguese expansion, Columbus (who spoke Portuguese before he did Castilian; married a Portuguese gentlewoman whose father was a governor in Portuguese Madeira; and who ran a bookselling and chart-making business with his brother in Lisbon) first brought his plan to sail to the Indies to John II of Portugal for support.⁴¹⁸ It was only after he was turned down by the Portuguese king (and later by King Henry VII of England and Charles VIII of France) that Columbus reinstated his appeal to Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella and finally received sponsorship from the Queen of Castile (fig. 41). Isabella pledged her personal jewels to fund Admiral Columbus' risky venture, although she was assured this would not be necessary.⁴¹⁹ Who knows? It might have been Isabella who personally would have taken the hit if Cristóbal Colón (the Spanish moniker he came to prefer) failed.

Since Constantinople's fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 (fig. 42), Europeans had been searching for a solution to remedy the loss of trade with Asia. Seaborne trade to the east was deemed the solution to restoring Europe's ready access to the highly desirable spice of the Indies: nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and pepper. It was this opportunity with which Columbus

tempted Isabella of Spain. But more than riches, it was the possibility of extending Christendom into Asia that motivated the pious queen.⁴²⁰

By the time Columbus had proposed his westward Atlantic venture, Bartolomeu Dias had already supplied the king of Portugal with an all-sea route from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean around the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. (A route that Vasco da Gama would exploit to full advantage ten years later with his circumnavigation of Africa, reaching southern India) Columbus himself witnessed Dias' "discreet entry" into Lisbon harbor upon his return to Portugal from his voyage of discovery. One can surmise that it was because of Dias' piloting success in pushing down the African West coast to the southern-most tip of the continent that John II did not think he needed the alternate passageway Columbus proposed.⁴²¹ John II decision to pass on Columbus' project has to be viewed as one of history's supreme contingencies.

As a result of Columbus' 1492 voyage (fig. 43), Spain and Portugal were brought to the brink of war over territorial rivalry. A commercial arrangement, the Treaty of Tordesillas, was entered between the two empires over Portuguese holdings in West Africa and the Atlantic Islands (Canary Islands, Madeira, The Azores, Cape Verde Islands, also São Tomé and Príncipe) and Columbus' discoveries of new lands in the Western Atlantic. The Treaty, signed in 1494, averted hostilities between Spain and Portugal by dividing the globe into two competing spheres of Spanish and Portuguese dominion. The line of demarcation was set at 370 leagues beyond the Cape Verde Islands.⁴²² For the future, this meant Portugal would have provenance over European interests in Africa and Spain would have purview over the New World (except for the later Portuguese claim on Brazil, which bulges out into the waters cut though by the nodal dividing line.)⁴²³ It was remarkable that two European nations were now

claiming possession of lands yet undiscovered, let alone conquered and colonized. All other European powers were left out of this division of sovereignty, which lasted for nearly 100 years.⁴²⁴ The now “legally” disenfranchised peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas, of course, had absolutely no say whatsoever in a matter that so impacted them.

From 1492 onwards, nothing would ever be the same again.⁴²⁵ Integrating the post-Columbian New World into old assumptions was a profoundly transformative experience. The European intellectual framework buckled in the face of a cascade of new challenges. It was unsettling that the ancient writers such as Pliny, the first-century Roman historian – “who knew not the half” – had not accounted for the existence of the New World.⁴²⁶ The physical nature of the universe as hitherto perceived was flouted by the event of Columbus’ landing in the West Indies. As historian Joyce Appleby observes, “It is one thing to know that the world was not flat and another to have an accurate idea about its shape. Europeans had neither.” Columbus himself thought the earth was shaped like a pear or a ball with a nipple, like the nipple on a women’s breast, on top. This nipple represented the newly discovered lands of Columbus’ enterprise at the center of Earthly Paradise.⁴²⁷ So proclaimed the self-anointed “Admiral of the Ocean Sea” in the log of his first expedition. Columbus was convinced that the Atlantic island he first set foot upon on October 12, 1492, which he named San Salvador, was just off the coast of Asia. In fact, Columbus had arrived in the Bahamas, with no idea that his act of discovery reunited two worlds long separated but for undocumented Viking, Polynesian or other (mythical) voyages in the lore of the sea or chance encounters by drifting fisherman.⁴²⁸

As the land Columbus stumbled upon revealed itself not as Asia but a new continent, Europeans had to come to terms with their changed orientation in the world, which was

reflected on cosmographers' maps that had to be reworked with every succeeding voyage of discovery. The warning engraved on the Pillars of Hercules, the name passed down from antiquity for the two promontories framing the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar and demarcating the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea – *ne plus ultra*, meaning go no further – now was totally laughable. And says Appleby, “Columbus’ discoveries were extraordinary enough to batter at the wall of inhibitions that surrounded questioning of Christian cosmology.” As “[o]ld ways of knowing were turned upside down.”⁴²⁹

The very nature of humankind was also called into question. Columbus found the Taino he first encountered in the New World “unlike even black Africans, the most exotic people he had ever met before.”⁴³⁰ The integrative phenomenon of a post-1492 Atlantic world was the long-distance interchange of organisms, of goods, and of services worldwide. This give-and-take disordered the biological, ecological and the sociological realms of human life on habitable Earth. It launched the redistribution of human beings, of crops (such as rice, corn, potatoes, sugarcane and tobacco), of animals, of germs, of ideologies, of beliefs, of cultural practices, of power and of wealth around the planet that shapes the modern world today: a phenomenon dubbed the “Columbian Exchange” by historian Alfred W. Crosby Jr. in his 1972 eponymous work of environmental history.⁴³¹ And although this epic upheaval is primarily addressed from the European perspective – partly because these are the accounts available to us (often as a function of literacy, white people’s histories) – it was a mutual, bilateral disruption that created a world of commercial and social interdependence. It is not hard to imagine that something along the same order as the Columbian Exchange had occurred beginning around 500 C.E when caravans first traversed the Saharan Desert between the Maghreb and the West African Sahal. It was the horses that came with the foreign traders

to the north that totally revolutionized the political culture in ways that made possible the rise of the great African empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhay. It was similar to the radical transformative impact the introduction of the horse had on the native peoples of the Great Plains of North America, although raising horses in West Africa presented greater challenges. No doubt pathogens were also part of this exchange. Rats and fleas crossing the Sahara may have been responsible for the catastrophic outbreak of the bubonic plague in the Sahal in the fourteenth century.⁴³²

In response to the Columbian turning point in history, after 1492 the adventuring Western world shifted its gaze from Africa (except as a source of human capital) to the New World (without which there would not have been the ongoing, insatiable demand for slaves, required of a plantation economy). New markets were opened and zones of production increased. Regional economies were sucked into a network of international trade. A geometric configuration came to define this Atlantic commerce, the “Triangular Trade,” (fig. 44) representing the three-continent relay that constituted a global circuit. It was the age of mercantilism: government licensing and regulation of all of national and imperial commercial interests. Goods manufactured in Europe, largely textiles and guns, were exchanged in West Africa for slaves. The notorious Middle Passage was the next leg of the relay to bring enslaved Africans to the slave markets of North and South America and the Caribbean where, if they survived the spirit-crushing, sick-making voyage they were sold for cash or molasses or its product rum (distilled in New England.): but mostly for the cash crops produced by the slave labor of their predecessors, sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton. These commodities were then sent on to Europe for processing, consumption and trade.⁴³³ And the cycle would begin again.

The year 1492 marked that instrumental arc in this dramatic turn in the “human geography of the planet”⁴³⁴ away from Homer’s “wine dark sea” to Columbus’ colloquial Ocean Sea.⁴³⁵ The Atlantic, which had once been an insuperable barrier, had now become a link.⁴³⁶

Paradigms

The interdisciplinary field of cultural studies is particularly hospitable to a holistic approach to investigating these Atlantic happenings. Performance theorist Joseph Roach calls this crucible of activity “the geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world.” Circum-Atlantic, as opposed to trans-Atlantic, so as not to favor the history of European exploration and the imperial networks of the Triangular Trade in sugar, slaves and capital over the histories of original peoples. Social theorist Paul Gilroy has coined this domain the “Black Atlantic” because slavery propels its formulation and is its coalescing factor. Enter a new paradigm of analysis as intellectual placeholder to incorporate the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas into the culture of modernity. Its purpose: to inscribe into memory the silenced voices of the marginalized.⁴³⁷ Memory is knowledge of the past. The Black Atlantic is a rejection of Eurocentric teleology that privileges Europeans as the actors in world events and everyone else as props. It is history from the bottom up.⁴³⁸ Its purpose to subvert – in the words of historian Anthony Pagden – “the gaze of the European as the only one which could confer existence upon the world.”⁴³⁹

Change in the paradigms that govern broad cultural understanding are *a priori* radical in nature.⁴⁴⁰ Paradigm shifts are more radical the longer they are constructed after contemporaneous understanding of the events fades. We can only understand our place in

history through our consciousness of the past – how in thinking about who and what came before us we reflect on the present: the time and place of our own living. The progress of history provides the context for a shared human recognition of what came before through the perspective of hindsight: *What's past is prologue*, as Shakespeare would have it.⁴⁴¹

The term “Atlantic” is explanatory for our times: the early modern people who lived in this geographic structure never conceptualized themselves as “Atlantic.”⁴⁴² The rubric “Atlanticism” stands for the historical reexamination of early modern mercantile and colonial history from the onset of European imperialism in the Age of Expansion and Exploration through the Age of Revolution as a regional system, dating roughly 1400–1800. It is an application of inquiry pioneered by two American Historians, Bernard Bailyn and Jack P. Green, which has achieved its primacy over the last twenty–odd years. Atlantic history encourages us to connect events, people, nations – not through a hub – but across a new regional web of oceanic possibility of economic and cultural exchange.⁴⁴³ Inevitably, the latest Atlantic discourse is around a post–Atlantic model as transnational and global history come to the fore. There are some scholars very prone to announcing the next new thing and the latest trend over. It seems to be the stuff of specialist conferences for some to announce as passé the very topic everyone has convened to celebrate. But Mediterranean history did not go away with the advent of Atlantic studies and neither will Atlantic history. In this project will try to keep it real through a wide-ranging, comparative perspective.

Gilroy’s ontology of the Black Atlantic – that slavery in its concretion formulates an interculture that transcends the nation state and any ethnic particularity – is a contribution to the organizing principle of Atlantic history – a concept of regional history integrated by the sea⁴⁴⁴ – which, itself, began as a response to French historian Fernand Braudel’s pioneering

use of the Mediterranean as a unit of historical study in 1949.⁴⁴⁵ History written from the perspective of the Black Atlantic recognizes that culture is porous; it does not know the rules of national allegiance. Culture can never be exclusive when there is transactional contact – both encounter *and exchange* – with others. And it was not only cultures on the receiving end of European incursion that were changing; Europeans themselves were adopting new social practices and customs.⁴⁴⁶ It was the beginning of the cultural construction of race and racism, as we understand, them as contacts with new lands and their peoples were underway.

With the world in constant flux in the early modern era, culture is no longer discrete – solely of Africa, of the Americas, of the Caribbean, or of Europe. Instead, it is an amalgamation of all of these influences at once. It is, as Gilroy states, “a coherent entity not just the sum of its national constituents.” It is a hybrid culture.⁴⁴⁷ This collective culture possesses its own narratives and strategies that supersede any specific ethnic homogeneity or national affinity to create something new, wholly its own, wholly original. The colonial encounter produced creole and mixed-race peoples different from either the European voyagers who arrived or the indigenous populations they encountered. The vortex of the Black Atlantic is syncretic – a fluid mashup.⁴⁴⁸ In this convergence of cultures the peoples of the globe were confronted with alterity, and all were challenged in their view of the world and in their understanding of what it meant to be human. It opened up, in Pagden’s observation, “the possibility, and for many the impossibility of cultural commensurability.”⁴⁴⁹ For every standard there was a deviation. Meeting fellow human beings, drastically different in language, creed, culture, custom, and, anatomy – especially color – could be both frightening and daunting.

No phenotype, nor culture, was more alien to Europeans than that of the autochthonous black African. The inverse was also true, as we shall see. Confronted with difference it is human nature for people to form “some conception of the difference between their own society and those of others.”⁴⁵⁰ And attitudes were not unitary. Perceptions were governed by the exigencies of class, status, gender, age, among the most salient distinctions.⁴⁵¹ Cultural contact makes demands on the self to understand the context that determines difference. In the disjunction of encounter we learn as much – if not more – about the observer based on ethnocentric assumptions than we do of the observed. As historian Stuart B. Schwartz identifies, “In such meetings across cultures, an ‘implicit ethnography’ existed on both sides of the encounter.”⁴⁵² And as Greg Dening alerts us, “There is now no Native past without the Stranger, no Stranger without the Native.”⁴⁵³

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PORTUGUESE IN WEST AFRICA

Moorings

Conjure memories with me.

My travel stories are intertwined with those which I study.

Captured in reverie, I sit on a tranquil beach staring out to sea. My only company, clusters of gangly palm trees impossibly anchored in bleached white sand bow gently in the late afternoon breeze. The cooling zephyrs off the water bring welcome relief from the oppressive sultry heat of a long tropical afternoon. Although I am facing due west, before me this gilt-inflected pale-blue ocean is not the familiar Pacific that borders Southern California where I have lived so long. No, contrary to my inner American compass, this watery westward expanse – shimmering in the fugitive light – is the Atlantic.

I am in West Africa. I am in Ghana.

I watch as an epic sun in all its golden molten glory slips slowly into the cleft of the horizon. Can it be that I feel the infinitesimal pitch of the earth rotating on its axis?

This idyllic spot on an isolated West African beach is just north of the town of Elmina (a fishing village really) – site of the first permanent European outpost in sub-Saharan Africa. Elmina Castle, built in 1482 by the Portuguese ten years before the fateful year of Columbus, is the earliest lasting depot of the European slave trade. Stark white, this calcified age-old structure gripping the earth like a massive barnacle dominates a grassy promontory that juts out to sea. Open to the abyss, a cleft in its seaward side is the infamous Door of No Return (fig. 45): the portal through which the slave castle's million-fold human cargo passed via gangplank to be loaded and ferried by canoe-like boats to the white man's hulking slavers –

sailing ships retrofitted for maximum occupancy under inhuman conditions – anchored offshore.

The lifeblood of Africa lost forever.

Haunting.

Today, the hoary stone fort is both a museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

A place of honor and remembrance.

A place of horror.

Back on the beach.

As I ponder my spatial and cultural disorientation, the brutal history and incongruity of the land to which I have recently arrived, the picture-postcard view fades to black. Stranger in a strange land I remain by the waves, which lap softly as night fully engulfs me. Then in the serendipity of a moment the Heavens yield a glorious surprise. Yes, I am still in the northern hemisphere, but in the latitudes of West Africa that approach the equator it is sometimes possible to see the signature feature of the southern hemispheric sky: the Southern Cross (fig. 46). And there it is, hanging low, the six-star constellation Crux, winking at me from the Milky Way. I know what I am seeing because as a North American visitor I have looked for it before in a more accustomed place – the night sky over Ularu in Australia. Now, on a beachfront in Ghana (fig. 47), I embrace my new contrariwise geographical, spatial, and intellectual order where this foreign Atlantic west coast faces my familiar Atlantic east coast and the northern sky inclines southly.

Beaches are beginnings and endings...

So says Greg Denning, for whom beaches are a potent metaphor for understanding cultural encounters.⁴⁵⁴ Investigating cultural encounter is my purpose here. I am on a quest. I

am in Ghana because I am looking for Othello – the archetypal Black Atlantic traveler – who in transiting oceans and continents crosses cultural dimensions.⁴⁵⁵ I have engineered a once in a lifetime journey through the penumbrae of the early modern Atlantic world with purpose and deliberation to find Othello's roots in Africa as a way to understand the early modern cultural encounter between Europeans and Africans and its lasting effects.

Imagine with me that the year is now 1455. Again, it is nighttime.

Not so far northwards up the African seaboard from where I contemplate the cosmos in present day Ghana, a young Venetian sea captain in the employ of a Portuguese Prince is also gazing at the stars. The mapping of the sky – (so familiar to a mariner) – transversed for him (as it did for me) when this early modern voyager sailed his ship into a sweet spot off what was then called the Upper Guinea Coast and anchored in the natural harbor of the magnificent estuary of the River Gambia.

The Gambia, as it is known, which gave name to the region, is one of West Africa's major rivers. It runs westward some 700 miles from the Fouta Djallon plateau in present day north Guinea through the states of Senagal and Gambia where it meets the mighty Atlantic ocean at the modern island city of Banjul. The Gambia was a great find for our explorer of yesteryear: it would become the first European trade route to the interior of Africa. It is the route imposed on Kunta Kinteh, the literary African hero of Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) as an enslaved captive destined for a life of bondage in the New World.

But our Renaissance visitor knows nothing of this.

As he gazes at the stars, the captain notices a distinct cross-like pattern of six bright stars he has never before seen appears. For a man whose life depends on the positional

bearings of his ship taken from celestial coordinates, what an astonishing event this change in the firmament must have been for him.

My fellow Atlantic traveler, summoned from a bygone era, is Alvise da Ca' da Mosto: to us, Cadamosto (fig. 48). He is on a mission of trade and exploration to a West African shore where no one from faraway Europe has ever been before. In his log that night Cadamosto notes for future navigational purposes the unfamiliar constellation that suddenly showed itself to him, and he limns its contours. His description and sketch of what he calls “The Southern Chariot” (*Carro do Sul*) is the earliest European record of the Southern Cross.⁴⁵⁶ Already among the learned of Cadamosto’s Europe, nearly fifty years before Columbus’ classic voyage, the size and shape of the earth was in question.

“Would we see the stars differently from different parts of the earth? We wouldn’t if the earth were flat,” so stipulates the modern-day popular scientist Isaac Asimov in a book for children. How we discovered the earth was round is a topic that endlessly fascinates.⁴⁵⁷ Did Cadamosto make the connection that Asimov discloses to his contemporary young readers thus moored, as he was off the coast of West Africa so long ago? Did the sudden appearance of a strange heavenly body cause him to further question the physical state of his world or solve some puzzles?

With the appearance of the Southern Cross our pioneering sea captain was presented with the ocular proof that he was sailing on a sphere, if he only chose to see it.⁴⁵⁸

Now in the present, more than half a millennium after Cadamosto chronicled his sighting, I wonder at the constancy of the Southern Cross as a symbol of cognition, as a way we structure our thoughts. Through this object – these random stars humanly ordered into a universal sign – I am made aware of something inside each of us, a subjectivity – a capacity to

reason. “The past, which we are mythically confident is knowable as such, is only known through symbols whose meaning is changed in the readings of them and in the preserving of them,” says Greg Dening.⁴⁵⁹ I grasp that across the trajectories of time and space our early modern Venetian traveler and I are both conscious human agents making sense of things, even though we are so opposite in the factors – culture and values – that are so apposite, so key to our understanding of what we apprehend.

“Making sense of what has happened is how we live,” says Dening.

Cadamosto in his own way I in mine.

The Southern Cross belongs to each of us equally across vectors, Cadamosto and me, as a symbol of understanding.

Also viewed as a symbol

– a symbol for understanding color difference or race consciousness – so does Othello.

This Othello project is predicated on what Dening calls the “confidence that the past is ordered in itself in such a way that we can make a narrative of it. It is text–able.” As a proponent of Dening’s “mythic confidence in a text–able past,” I concur with his view: “The past itself is evanescent: it has existence only in histories. Histories are the texted past.” As such, “Past and present are bound together in an interpretive act we call History.”⁴⁶⁰ But in writing history as in all things, contingencies mediate the sense of selfhood that is at the recesses of our perception – our touchstone of reality. Writing history is a performance of the past that is unique to the person crafting the narrative. The historian is a cultural person who has – as Dening defines it – “an ethnography.” An ethnography that testifies to the consciousness of the individual author and to what he or she brings to the telling of past events.⁴⁶¹ Simply acknowledging this is the first step in the direction of honest inquiry. It is a

central tenant to my undertaking and presenting this work.

History has to be rewritten in every generation, because although the past does not change the present does; each generation asks new questions of the past, and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experience of its predecessors.

– Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*

Othello's saga, which will unfold site-specifically in Part Two, is a signifying passageway through the multinational/transcultural early modern Black Atlantic, crossing borders of race, nation and descent. Othello is a product of this world; his identity was entirely shaped by it, first in West Africa and then in Europe. Othello's case is illustrative of the peculiar juxtaposition of two meta-cultures, Africa and Europe: his origins are of both, providing a micro-history of the sixteenth century.⁴⁶² Through Othello's biography it is possible to attach a person to what is otherwise an abstraction: the multitudes of the African Diaspora who constitute the mind-numbing statistics of the largest forced migration in history. To look at the social, political and culturally environments within which Othello lived, as I do in Part Two, is to further enhance our understanding and appreciation of the early modern Black Atlantic World and Othello's place in it.

Let's go deeper...

Black Empires of the Niger

While Europe was finding its sea legs of empire under the Tudors and Stuarts, on the other side of the world, in West Africa, the last of the great empires with fabled capitals located along the River Niger, Jenne (site of the Great Mosque) and Timbuktu (fig. 49) and Gao, were in decline. Today Timbuktu is a metaphor for the end of the earth – most remote location on the planet – the place beyond the beyond. That Africa fostered wealthy cultured,

and technologically advanced civilizations will surprise many whose perceptions have been tainted by slavery and colonialism. They may relate more to *The New York Times* opinion columnist Nicholas D. Kristof's twenty-first century observation: "Generations of Americans have learned to pity Africa. It's mainly seen as a quagmire of famine and genocide, a destination only for a sardonic safari or a masochistic aid mission."⁴⁶³ How little we understand about the European relationship to Africa; without Africa there would be no America, and so much of Africa was destroyed in that transposition to arrive at the state of world as it is today.⁴⁶⁴

It is hard to imagine Western Africa before European incursion, specifically the magnificence of ancient Mali. Situated near the all-important gold fields to the south and the agriculturally rich interior delta of the Niger River, the Empire of Mali came second in order among the three successive black empires of pre-colonial Africa that occupied the territory of the Western Sudan. The Kingdom of Ghana (nothing to do with the modern nation except in providing its name) (fig. 50) of the Soninke people preceded the Empire of Mali, and Songhay succeeded it.⁴⁶⁵ These were the Sudanic Kingdoms named for their location in the Western Sudan (nothing to do with the countries that carry Sudan as a name today.) All in all, these three empires, built on gold, existed from approximately 750 to 1700 CE.⁴⁶⁶

What is critical in the development of the civilization of the Western Sudan is that the empire of Ghana was followed directly by the Mali empire and in the same way the Songhay empire directly succeeded the Mali kingdom. Indeed, the Mali empire still factored into the imagination and the perception of the Songhay kingdom, which are at times somewhat conflated due to overlaps in the transition of government and also in the common imprecise usage of the name Mali. All in all, what this era of empires means for the region is that there

was never a vacuum of power between regime changes and the all-critical trans-Saharan trade across the desert sands to the North African littoral and on into Europe and the Middle East was never uninterrupted.⁴⁶⁷ The strength of the black kingdoms rested on exchange of salt (some manufactured in Portugal) – critical to life – for gold.⁴⁶⁸ Along this great highway of trade not only goods but religion, technology and ideas were transported.⁴⁶⁹ These powerful African empires all depended on slave armies and civil servants, also among the ranks of the enslaved, who kept fractious vassals in line.⁴⁷⁰

The Sudanic empires are home to three fabled cities of vital importance linked by the Niger River system as centers of trade – Jenne, Gao, and the legendary Timbuktu. Technically these termini were “transshipment” points of the caravan routes serviced by donkeys to the south and camels to the north and boats plying river-traffic in between, meaning they were controlled locations through which goods of one kind from one distant source were transferred through trade to another distant source⁴⁷¹ – such as salt for gold, horses for slaves. The large-canoe transport on the Niger waterway was critical to the economic life of the Western Sudan. Riverine routes from the coast penetrated deep into West Africa. The navigable Senegal, the Gambia, and (to a lesser degree) the Benue rivers were an important interdependent hydrographic network with the Niger expediting fluvial transportation of hefty cargoes over distances otherwise impossible to surmount. For years, the Senegal, the Gambia, and the Niger were conflated by Muslim travelers into a single “Nile of the Blacks,” which they imagined connected to the “Nile of Egypt.”⁴⁷² It is because of the intricacies of this interregional trade system that throughout the history of the three empires it was never possible for the rulers themselves, or in the end, outside invaders to exert control (other than tribute bonds) or capture the source of the gold fields to the south in the auriferous upper

valley of the Black Volta, and the Akan forest region. A special class of Mande traders who were Muslims conducted the gold business for all the empires. Called the Juulu (Jula); they were of the Wangara clan.⁴⁷³ Only the Wangarans knew the source of the gold. The location of the mines was carefully guarded secret whose source confounded and fascinated outsiders for over two thousand years.⁴⁷⁴

“Ghana” was the title of the ruler of Wagadu. This name has been attached by historians to the Empire of Ghana, which was at its apex from ninth century to the eleventh, lasting through the twelfth.⁴⁷⁵ Most of the people spoke Soninke. Ghana was at its height was the first trading intercessor of the trans-Saharan trade in the western Sudan that could monopolize the access of the rest of the world to the bullion of West Africa, the placer mines of Bambuk and Buré goldfields.⁴⁷⁶ Until the discovery of the Americas this was the main source of this precious metal.⁴⁷⁷ In Ghana, gold dust was traded liberally, but nuggets went to the king. The traders from the North were Muslim Berbers and Arabs: the Arabs called this territory – *Bilad al-Sudan* – Land of the Blacks. Sometimes local rulers traded slaves for horses from the north to be used in military campaigns and slave raids.⁴⁷⁸ The Islamic trade in slaves created what had been a modest to nonexistent indigenous institution of slavery in the Western Sudan into a viable social institution. As the large empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay flourished, the increased capture of slaves was a by-product of the upsurge in warfare such powerful and sophisticated political systems engendered as enslavement became an accepted consequence of war for the vanquished and slaves a valuable commodity for the victors.⁴⁷⁹

The Muslim Berbers and the Arabs established their religion from the eighth to ninth century onward south to the savannah below the Sahara. Some of the local rulers living in the transition zone between desert and the savannah, called the Sahel (literally “the shore”), began

to adopt the faith of the traders. Conversion to Islam was the work religious instructors who came for the purpose of converting the political elite. The ruling class was often Islamicized while the average person was not. It was when the political elites of the local societies converted to Islam that it became a religion that fostered alliances among the merchants and the governing powers, pushing slowly but surely into the depths of the western Sudan.⁴⁸⁰ It was a feature of the society that Islam established a symbiotic relationship with traditional religion. The sons of the political class might even be sent to study with Muslim clerics without the expectation that they would convert, of course, some did.⁴⁸¹ By the mid-twelfth century Islam was the religion of the ruler of Ghana. The king revered the true caliph in Baghdad.⁴⁸²

During the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries CE, the trans-Saharan Islamic slave trade was firmly established, transporting black slaves into the Mediterranean basin, the Persian gulf, the Indian Ocean, and, also, into the northern Saharan states. At that time black skin color was not the issue, faith was. Muslims used religion as a way to categorize slaves as different, and most sub-Saharan Africans were beyond the purview of Islam – and hence subject to slavery as non-believers. By the year 1600, approximately 2,400,000 of these black Africans were exported to Muslim polities to serve in the military and function as domestic servants. (The final estimate of the extent of Islamic trade is a staggering 11 million – rivaling the numbers transported in the Middle Passage.) The most attractive women were enlisted as concubines in harems overseen by male black African slaves made eunuchs (fig. 99). It is ironic that the slave trade itself eventually brought Islam as a belief system to the Western Sudan.⁴⁸³

After an interim century of Susu rule, the Malians took over the Kingdom of Ghana and expanded west, creating an enormous empire, eventually growing even richer than their predecessors.

Sundiata Keita is the legendary warrior king – the Lion King – who in the thirteenth-century founded the Mali Empire. He is the celebrated hero of the Mande-speaking, Malinke (Mandinka or Mandinga)⁴⁸⁴ for having brought together a disparate people and achieved unity as a benevolent ruler. Generations of Malinke *griots* – the keepers of historical memory, the singers of heroic songs, and the counselors to rulers in Africa – have transmitted the epic of Sundiata to their people as oral tradition, “the oldest form of relating history.”⁴⁸⁵ History is culturally shared public knowledge of the past. It “is a human universal.”⁴⁸⁶ Yet for Europeans in the age of expansion, to confront people without written language was to confront people without a past – quite simply, people who lacked writing lacked history.⁴⁸⁷

One transcription from an oral source gives us invaluable insight into this custom and the art of the griots and acquaintance with a Malinke master poet, active in living memory long after Sundiata lived.

I am a griot. It is I, Djeli Mamadou Kouyate... master in the art of eloquence. Since time immemorial the Kouyates have been in the service of the Keita princes of Mali; we are vessels of centuries old. The art of eloquence has no secrets for us; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations... I know the list of all the sovereigns who succeeded to the throne of Mali... I teach kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as example, for the world is old, but the future springs from the past... Listen to my word, you who want to know, by my mouth you will learn the history of Mali... listen then, sons of Mali, children of the black people, listen to my word, for I am going to tell you of Sundiata,... the master of a hundred vanished kings...⁴⁸⁸

That West African people have oral traditions should not be misconstrued for the lack of civilization, which is what it has been perceived to be by Europeans over time. Because of the absence of a Western-style documentary record Africa is very often treated not as a subject of history, but as an object of history. And a monolithic one at that. With the rise of performance studies in Western theater scholarship, greater appreciation of oral tradition for its distinction as the oldest form of relating history: as a scheme of artistic thought – a total view of life through which the flow of the creative spirit proceeds – has reformed the view of the academy. African narratives are now being appropriately considered as “examples of sociological theory” that reflects the self-reflective thoughts and feelings of a people.⁴⁸⁹ The Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, has revived the term “orature” (first adopted by Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu in the early seventies) as a self-encompassing term to apply to African oral traditions to signify “an oral system of aesthetics that does not need validity from the literary.”⁴⁹⁰

Thiong’o’s defense of oral tradition is up against an intractable Western tradition that historically has valued literacy as the “ultimate measure of humanity.” It follows then that the act of denying African-descended people living under enslavement the opportunity to read and write by their oppressors – which was the universal practice – social genocide. Writing about the emergence in the eighteenth century of an Anglo–African literary tradition for the first time in the form of the Slave Narrative, Henry Louis Gates observes: “Precisely because successive Western cultures have privileged written over oral and musical forms, the writing of black people in Western languages has remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject.”⁴⁹¹

Mansa Musa (fig. 26) of the Malinke people was the ninth king of the great West African Empire of Mali that rose to prominence in fourteenth century primarily through its trade in gold to the merchants of the Mediterranean world beginning as early as the Roman era. Mansa Musa ruled from 1312 to 1337 over a realm that stretched from the Atlantic coast, bordering modern Senegal to the national boundaries of present-day Nigeria in the east, extending well into the Sahara Desert of the north. Only the rainforest perimeter – from coastal Liberia to Benin – existed outside his purview. Mansa Musa was a Muslim. Under his rule Islam was dominant among the members of the court and in the major trading centers such as Jenne, the most ancient known city in sub-Saharan Africa, and Timbuktu, located on the southern border of the Sahara just northward of the Niger's massive bend (fig. 51).

Timbuktu once known as the thriving crossroads of the great caravan route that traversed the Sahara, bringing salt, spices and cloth from the north to stock the stalls of merchants who traded in the cities labyrinthine network of narrow streets, and the great river, whose watercraft conveyed gold and slaves from West Africa. Timbuktu over the centuries became a synonym for the remotest place on earth. The artifacts of one of the greatest flowerings of Islamic learning in the course of history – manuscripts copied by a host of scribes from the books that made their way along the ancient tradeways: treatises on philosophy, law, the medical arts, the natural world and astronomy were loving preserved into the present century as Timbuktu grew more and more isolated.

“Beyond their physical presence, Timbuktu's artifacts are a priceless reminder that sub-Saharan Africa has a long history of deep intellectual endeavor, and that some of that history is written down, not just transmitted orally down the generations.” It is a priceless record of Africa's golden age – of the Mali Empire. The Empire of Mali became a center of

intellectual erudition and Islamic learning bringing writing in Arabic to the culture, belying the notion that African cultures were uniformly illiterate.⁴⁹²

That Mansa Musa's rule marks the apex of the Mali Empire's achievement and reputation is no doubt due to his visibility, which is how he ended up so prominently featured on the Catalan Atlas. The Malian kings decided to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 accompanied by an enormous retinue that included a contingent of 500 slaves each carrying a staff of gold, visiting Cairo along the way. Throughout the *hajj* the lavish display of gold that accompanied Mansa Musa stunned observers wherever he went. As a pious Muslim he was committed to acts of largesse, spreading inconceivable amounts of gold throughout Egypt, some medievalist actually maintain that so much gold flowed into the local markets that that the gold standard in the Mediterranean communities affected almost gave way under the pressure. The Malian trade in gold during Mansa Musa's lifetime critically affected both the European and Arab economies of the early modern world.

By the time Prince Henry's Captain, sailed down the coast of West Africa in the mid-fifteenth century to Senegambia, the Empire of Mali that Musa Mansa represents was succumbing to the chieftains of the Songhay. Timbuktu fell to the cavalry of the Songhay in 1469.⁴⁹³ And although Cadamosto never found the elusive Wangara gold mines for his avaricious princely benefactor, he came tantalizingly close. Cadamosto got near enough to the mines in his sojourn in the fabled Empire of Mali that he was able to learn from interviews with Arab and Sanjaha traders of the "silent trade" in gold and salt that had long sustained the region.⁴⁹⁴ What the story of Mansa Musa reflects is the degree of sophistication West African civilization achieved in the pre-European era, easily matching the accomplishments associated with the European and Arab worlds. Here, contrary to European opinion, blackness

did not prevent the creation of civilization: urban centers, a robust economy, advanced learning (both secular and religious) and, above all, hospitality.⁴⁹⁵ Yes, and as we have seen, like Medieval Europe there was slavery. This side of the story – the African side of the story – once central – has been overlooked in the history of the European discovery of Africa.⁴⁹⁶ What also gets overlooked is the extent to which the decline of the Sudanic empires of the Land of the Blacks can be tied to the rise of the trans-Atlantic trade during the last empire, the Songhay empire.

Sonni Ali Ber, the first emperor of Songhay, ruling through the latter half of the fifteenth century was a fabled king. His capital was Gao. Sonni Ali was Muslim, just like the kings of Mali, whom he succeeded; but he was lax in the exercise of his belief. A horseman and a brilliant general, he was able to command and extend his realm. He captured slaves as he expanded.⁴⁹⁷ He subordinated the powerful metropolises of Jenne and Timbuktu, who resisted his authority, to his dominion through harsh and protracted assault. He achieved his objective to retain control of the gold trade. To many Sonni Ali is a tyrant. However, his questionable practices preserved the unity of the state and brought great prosperity to the Songhay Empire. Askia Muhammad with no legitimate claim to the throne – a man of Soninke heritage rather than Songhay – came to power through a military coup in 1493 that deposed Sonni Ali's son. Askia Muhammad consolidated power through diplomatic and military means – he expanded Sonni Ali's reliance on horses, creating a cavalry. He was extremely successful and forming alliances, and he set up a functional network for local governance throughout his kingdom. As a devout Muslim, in 1495, he emulated Mansa Musa and made a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Although less elaborate than the Mansa's *hajj* it was still a rich expedition with a 500 mounted warriors and 1000 infantrymen in tow,

supported by three hundred thousand pieces of gold.

Through his erudition Askya Muhammad encouraged the traditions of Jenne and Timbuktu cites as important centers of learning and invested in their restoration. Askya Muhammad was “a mortal enemy to the Jews” and an inveterate slaveholder of non-Islamic African people. It was during his reign that Leo Africanus visited the kingdom of Songhay and its three famous capitals: Gao (the seat of government), Jenne (the seat of medicine and Islamic scholarship, and Timbuktu (the seat of culture and trade): The ruling families of Timbuktu produced brothers who were both scholars and merchants. Askya Muhammad was deposed by his own sons in 1531, precipitating a decline in the fortunes of the empire, and a period of civil war ensued. In the 1590s, Moroccan invaders overran the etiolated Songhay Empire with a 5000-man army bearing guns. It was a classic trumping of a new weapons technology over the old. Access to the source of the gold demanded by the conquerors was never forthcoming; the policy of passive resistance successfully stymied the invading army and the North Africans eventually abandoned the Land of the Blacks. In their wake, nearly 800 years of regional dominance by great empires was also over.⁴⁹⁸

In spite of the sudden blow yielded to the state by the invasion of the mercenaries sent by the King of Morocco, military defeat was not the only factor in Songhay’s demise. The Songhay Empire was already in terminal decline by the time the foreign invaders captured Gao and Timbuktu in 1591, which speaks to its vulnerability to conquest in the first place.⁴⁹⁹ Specifically, it can be argued that Timbuktu, and hence the Songhay Empire, lost its influence because its market corroded. How do we account for the loss of prestige of such a highly evolved and long-enduring commercial and cultural center? The simple answer lies in a theme of this essay: “the general decline of Mediterranean trade resulting from the emergence

of the new Trans-Oceanic trade...” shifted the entire world’s political and economic hegemony. West Central Africa was as affected by the interdependency of these international regional trading networks as any nation of Europe. The western Sudan, The Land of the Blacks was allied with the old Mediterranean order. As a result it was going down.

The entire trans-Saharan trade was weakened irrevocably by the strategy that Henry the Navigator adopted to control the gold monopoly, which was to bypass the ports of North Africa and deal directly with the African gold producers. These producers could now choose to cut out their own middlemen at the transshipment centers of Gao, Jenne, and especially Timbuktu and negotiate directly with the ultimate buyer, the Europeans through partners on the coast. In a very short span of years, the centuries old way the gold trade had been conducted was circumvented. The same principle held true for the slave trade. And the Portuguese were quite capable of supplying the salt, the horses, the cowry shells from the Maldiv Islands (which were used as currency) and the textiles the African market demanded. The fall of the Songhay Empire only reinforced this diminution of the caravan market share by destroying the political and commercial networks of empire that could secure the risky trades routes through the Sahara upon which the Mediterranean trading system depended. Another reason is that change was coming to the time-honored trade anyway, which would affect the Portuguese trade as well: the extraction capacity of the goldfields was reaching exhaustion. The trade in human cargo soon eclipsed the trade in gold on the Gold Coast itself. The decline of the influence of the last of the Sudanic black empires was a perfect storm of consequence: “the interactions of domestic/institutional and international/economic factors.”⁵⁰⁰

The great city of Timbuktu – now lying within the borders of the present-day nation of

Mali – is under attack again. Islamist rebels captured the city in April 2012. They imposed a strict Islamic rule, causing many to flee their homes in what was previously a cosmopolitan oasis.⁵⁰¹ In an act of unmitigated horror, after asserting their violation of strict Shariah law a young couple was stoned to death by Islamists in a town in the region of Timbuktu. They were accused of having children outside of wedlock.⁵⁰² Fundamentalist groups affiliated with Al Qaeda have declared war on Sufism, an enlightened, mystical sect of Islam that was and is practiced in Timbuktu, this ancient center of learning with its madrassas and libraries. The tombs of Sufi saints, popular in public devotion, are being destroyed as idolatrous. This is a redux of the Afghani Taliban's 2001 wanton destruction of two gigantic stone carvings of the Buddha in Bamiyan Province, 150 miles from Kabul, that were carved into the cliffs 1500 to 1700 years ago. The iconic stone images were destroyed for being graven images that are an affront to Islam, using the ballistic fire–power of twenty–first century warfare.⁵⁰³ The great fear has been that the Koranic archives of Timbuktu will be similarly destroyed for some perceived religious offense. The current crisis prompted a herculean effort to save the cultural legacy by removing the manuscripts from the libraries, and hiding them from those who would destroy the record in the name of a new brand of Islam. One that is practiced by Al Qaeda terrorists with no regard for history, cultural legacy or human decency. As of February 2013:

None of the city's libraries are in a hurry to return their collections from their hiding places, even though Timbuktu is back under government control. French forces are now stationed in Gao, Timbuktu and outside the town of Kidal, in the north, and airstrikes continue against the militants near the border with Algeria. The fighters have been chased away from major towns, but no one is sure whether they will come back.⁵⁰⁴

Two hundred miles south in central Mali near Jenne (Djenne), in Jenne–Jenno

(Djenne–Djenno), the archeological site of the ancient city, another kind of cultural war is being fought. The battle here is over control of the stunning terra–cotta artifacts of the past. Who will own the art of the ancestors of the people of Mali? The competition for digging the location over the years has been, on the one hand, looters in it for substantial gain, or just to put food on the table, who supply an international art market willing to turn a blind eye to the illegalities of the trade in collectable antiquities and, on the other hand, the mostly foreign archeologists trying to preserve a cultural legacy. “In short, the wars over art as cultural property take many forms: material, political and ideological,” Holland Cotter reminds us, writing in the “Art” section of *The New York Times* one Sunday in the Summer of 2012. Africa does not have to be “the loser” he avers, “if we acknowledge Africa as the determining voice in every conversation.”⁵⁰⁵ I am not sure how we begin to do that when we have never done it before.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, provides us with an early first hand account of black Atlantic cultural interaction in his published travel narrative, *The Voyages of Cadamosto* – a work of autobiography written in vernacular Italian that relates the merchant–explorer’s experience of two voyages to Senegambia, between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers (1455 and 1456), while in the service of “Prince Henry the Navigator” of Portugal, “one of the most notorious figures of western history.”⁵⁰⁶ The Venetian includes in his narrative from the first expedition vivid descriptions of daily life of the people of the “Kingdom of Senega:” a Wolof domain of rather nominal Islamic belief, as Cadamosto observed. “Medieval West Africa...constituted a part of the civilization of Islam.”⁵⁰⁷ In sub-Saharan Africa, Islam was present as a practiced religion in Senegambia, the interior of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and the Bight of Benin.

The land Cadamosto visited is located near the mouth of the Senegal River.

I...was moved to sail the ocean sea...towards the south in the land of the Blacks... On this my journey I saw many things new and worthy of notice.... I decided it would be laudable to make some record of them... –for truly both our customs and lands, in comparison with those seen by me, might be called another world...

In a later entry, Cadamosto describes the divide between the very different cultures of the Saharan people North of the Senegal River and the blacks to the South where the arid terrain gave way to cultivated fields of rice and yams and lush tropical rainforests.

It appears to me a very marvelous thing that beyond the river all men are very black, tall and big, their bodies well formed; and the whole country green, full of trees, and fertile; while, on this side, the men are brownish, lean, ill-nourished, and small in stature: and the country sterile and arid.⁵⁰⁸

As indulgent Muslims who had no qualms about conducting commerce with non-believers, the Wolof elites were quite ready to engage in trade with the Christian infidel. The local rulers and merchants particularly favored the swap of horses for slaves: one fine horse brought by the Portuguese would seal the bondage of ten West African men. Cadamosto writes of his relationship with the Wolof aristocracy as quite cordial and mutually respectful. This is a very unusual attitude for a Christian from Southern Europe to have taken – not only to black men, but to men of Muslim faith. Cadamosto's Portuguese patron, Prince Henry, was a particularly vehement foe of Islam, and a crusading zealot.⁵⁰⁹ However, removed from Henry's circle, the young Venetian navigator established a close association with the ruling Budomel of Cayor), fifty miles beyond the Senegal River, a young man named "Zucholin," whose manners and intellect he placed on par with any European. And perhaps the ruling Wolof king was not so far removed from Europe after all. In the oral history of the Wolof, the

story goes, through their founding Jolof monarch, they are related to the Almoravids of North Africa who conquered Spain and Portugal seven hundred years before.⁵¹⁰

Much as he could admire the Wolof king as a cultured man, Cadamosto was shocked by the overt sexuality of the Budomel, whom he labeled a “lascivious negro.” Zucholin shared a concern he had about the need to enhance his priapic performance in order to effectively service his thirty–odd wives and concubines. He inquired if the Venetian had any tips for endurance in the bedroom, for which he offered the voyager “a great reward.” Cadamosto does not clue us in on whether he had any advice to offer or not. But just imagine in our day the excellent trade the young merchant could have conducted in Viagra. Some needs never change. No doubt the opportunity for profit would have subordinated any qualms Cadamosto would have had concerning his client's promiscuity. Clearly the Venetian was disturbed by his host's practice of polygyny, which was, in fact, a social marker of wealth, and not “unregenerate lust.”⁵¹¹ It was from his many wives distributed throughout the land in villages of straw huts that the Budomel and his large entourage was able to be supported as he made his royal progress. Profit often trumps moral concern in Black Atlantic business practice just as it does in international business today. It is noteworthy that Cadamosto had no inhibitions when it came to his own questionable sexual behavior. At the end of his stay with the Budomel he accepted the gift of a twelve–year–old girl: “a handsome negress”... “for the service of my chamber.”⁵¹² Perhaps he offered some good sex tips after all.

This child Cadamosto received is given no name. She is objectified for her beauty and for her avowed function to bring the visiting captain carnal pleasure, which is expressed by him in the most matter of fact manner. Accounting for the differing mores of centuries ago, cannot mask that Cadamosto's “enjoyment” of this little girl is a grotesque act of child abuse

and sexual violence. Even if it were the custom of the time in both worlds represented – hers and his – to consider this little girl’s condition as property normal and her rape an accepted state of her circumstances, to simply ignore her plight without comment here would be a double indignity. History is a state of evolving consciousness. As Greg Duning tells us: “We know instinctively that this consciousness of things past is, in fact, our present.”⁵¹³ It is our present that requires attention must be paid to the person without a voice, this little girl denied her human agency – her humanity.

How much does this Wolof girl’s blackness define her personhood or lack of personhood in the Venetian’s eyes? Speaking of eyes, did he read the terror and grief surely reflected in them? Did he even look into her eyes?

You have seen her eyes – deadened with horror – in the faces of the young girls from Afghanistan, India, or name any country where innocents are sold like chattel as child brides or any American city with its underage prostitutes forced into sexual bondage. You see these images in the staring at you from newspapers, magazines, tablet and computer screens.

How is it possible to feel anything other than an appalled sympathy? Moral outrage is the arbiter of civility we possess. I agree with Greg Dening, “if we would narrate the pain of others, there must be compassion...”⁵¹⁴

Cadamosto comments on how clean the people of this child’s country are. What would this little girl say about him?

Adopting what we recognize as an anthropological approach, Cadamosto describes visits to local markets where cotton, palm oil, palm mats, millet and carved wooden utensils were bartered. Also at the local markets snake charmers performed who fascinated the explorer for their “magic.” The European merchant–explorer even knowingly writes himself

into the narrative of oddities. He offers his own person as a fascinating curiosity to the market crowds who had never before seen a white man. Men and women would rub Cadamosto's skin with their spittle to see if his pale flesh would erase before their eyes, and he would be revealed to be naturally dark under a layer of "whiteness." When the Africans discovered that the captain's skin was naturally white and not dyed, they were "astounded." And they hardly "marveled" less at his clothing: dark woolens, a cloak and a damask surcoat, highly inappropriate for the oppressive heat. A real prize that Cadamosto purchased in the course of his voyages was the musk of the civet cat, expressed from the wild animal's anal glands, which improbably was valued as a rare perfume thought to protect people from the plague. (In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare concocts a humorous exchange between Touchstone, the worldly court fool, and Corin, the not so foolish simple shepherd, on the peculiar origin of civet as a sweet scent.)⁵¹⁵ The young explorer also provides the earliest first-hand account by a European of African elephants *in situ*, contributing mightily to his cataloging of novelties. Cadamosto collected some salted elephant meat; two elephant's feet and a huge tusk as souvenirs to take back to Portugal for his royal sponsor.⁵¹⁶

Marvelous Things

The Renaissance – the term that literally means rebirth – was a cultural movement across Europe that was predicated on the rediscovery of classical texts. The capture of Córdoba from the Muslims released the stores from their libraries containing the works of the ancients. The influx of Greek scholars into Italy with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 also helped unleash an extraordinary flowering of literature and art as perspective shifted to interpreting the secular precepts of Greco-Roman philosophy and aesthetics, boldly challenging the religiosity and moral insularity of Medieval Christian thought.⁵¹⁷ As Stephen Greenblatt explains in *The Swerve*, “Something happened in the Renaissance, something that surged up against the constraints that centuries had constructed around curiosity, desire, individuality, sustained attention to the material world, the claims of the body.” It was the release of forces that ushered in modernity and changed our world. Shakespeare – that wellspring who bridged the consciousness between worlds medieval and modern in a turn towards secularization and humanism – was part of the movement of writers and artists that produced an unprecedented number of creative geniuses: Raphael, Michelangelo, Cervantes, and Montaigne, to name just a few.⁵¹⁸

Fascination with the foreign and the peculiar was a feature of Renaissance Europe. Political, cultural, and religious elites alike – and certainly the wealthy merchants who acquired them – came to value the possession of marvelous things from far off places, which they featured in private collections: their “cabinet of curiosities” or *Kunstammern*.⁵¹⁹ The elephant products that Cadamosto returned with for Prince Henry can be categorized as prized esoterica. So would have been the live the apes and baboons Cadomosto’s crew acquired, if

any survived the voyage.⁵²⁰ It was not long before human beings themselves became collectible novelties, as slaves were not only valued for their labor but for the status they conferred as luxury items. The black pageboy dressed in finery and often sporting a collar of gold or silver became a favorite at the courts of Europe; they were often depicted in the portraits of their royal master and mistresses. By the seventeenth century London was witness to the merchant class trolling the streets with little black bondservants attending them.⁵²¹

Cadamosto does not say if he returned with examples of the carved wood items he admired in the markets, but it is likely. These objects, the cultural products of the non-Western Other, which are now considered fine art by us, were valued for then valued for their exoticism. They were desired for their strangeness not their aesthetics. Art in Renaissance terms was numinous – reserved for the glorification of the Christian deity. Its apt accommodation was a house of worship. In the standards of the times, what was beautiful was only that which was good, true and godly. The tradition of collecting trade goods and plunder from the far reaches of the globe was a secular impulse that has resulted the monumental collections of such world-class cultural institutions as the British Museum and Le musée du quai Branly in Paris.⁵²²

A strange example of the incorporated legacy of these Renaissance traditions of acquisition and exhibition is the Municipal Museum (*Museu Municipal*), located behind the church of Santo António in Lagos, Portugal. The church houses some exquisite religious art pieces, carvings and paintings.⁵²³ As both a relic of the Renaissance *Kunstammern* and as an example of Christian aesthetics, the museum/church complex of Santo António is its own curiosity. The hidden-away museum portion, which you enter through a renaissance portico, has been open since 1934 and contains the private collection of Dr. José Formosinho. The

items on display are a bizarre, un-catalogued, dusty jumble of artifacts encompassing the fields of archeology, the history of Lagos, the ethnography of Africa, paintings, coins, and gems. Among the few native African woodcarvings of the abstracted human figure represented in the collection is an intricately carved ivory hunting horn, an Oliphant (fig. 52). This beautiful object is an example of what are called Afro-Portuguese ivories – saltcellars (see fig. 53, fig. 54), dagger handles (fig. 55), spoons, figurines, crucifixes – which constitute a tradition of West African export art, popular with Renaissance upper crust consumers that emerged out of the encounter of cultures in West Africa. Images of the Portuguese themselves – particularly bearded knights – are often depicted on these objects, which were prized collectables (see fig. 56, fig. 57).

It is now universally recognized that the founders of the avant-garde, Picasso and Matisse, were attracted to and inspired by the formal aspects of carved African sculpture – like the examples on display next to the Oliphant in the museum in Lagos. The great modern masters studied African cultural objects on display in the first anthropological museum of Paris, the now defunct Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro.⁵²⁴ Picasso and Matisse were able to purchase their own African-made figures in the flea markets of the Left Bank; we see them featured in photographs of their studios.⁵²⁵ There are those who argue that the entire trajectory of Western art, with its traditional emphasis on a realistic representation of life, would not have taken the critical turn to modernism without the influence of the non-Western aesthetic that informed the work of the pioneers of abstract art. Meyer Schapiro, the famous art historian speaks to this extraordinary reversal: “By a remarkable process the arts of subjugated backwards peoples, discovered by Europeans in conquering the world, became aesthetic norms to those who renounced it.”⁵²⁶ The degree to which African sculpture once

seen as “inchoate and primordial” were appropriated by western artists to create a new aesthetic was shockingly evident in 1984 at groundbreaking art show put on by the Museum of Modern Art in New York entitled “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity and the Tribal and the Modern.” For many who saw the exhibition, myself included, the anonymous “primitive” works outshone the famous contemporary masters (see, for example, fig. 58, fig. 59).⁵²⁷

Increasingly the culturally displaced works of non-Western art housed in Western museums are recognized as the plundered cultural patrimony of the people who produced them, and there is a diplomatic clamor to return them to their native worlds. Cases of conflict are emerging with every transfer of ownership. By way of example, in 2012, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acquired a private collection of Benin bronzes and sculptures in ivory, dating from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, created in lands that are part of present day Nigeria. According to the Nigerian National Commission for Museums, these works were looted by the British military in the nineteenth century. The Nigerian government has laid claim to them, demanding their return.⁵²⁸ All these rare objects in the hands of foreigners can be traced back to Prince Henry and his captains’ penchant for collecting the souvenirs of a strange new world.

Iberian Christendom and Islam

Cadamosto's patron, Prince Henry of Portugal (Infante Dom Henrique), was born in 1394, the third surviving son of King John I (João I), (a bastard son of a former king) who founded the Avis dynasty, and a dynamo of an English mother, Philippa of Lancaster (daughter to the Lancastrian prince, John of Gaunt).⁵²⁹ Henry became known through the course of history as "The Navigator" for initiating the voyages to West Africa in the mid-fifteenth century that laid the groundwork for the Portuguese seaborne empire that eventually extended to the East coast of Africa, India and Macau. Prince Henry fascinates as a figure straddling two ages. He was a seminal player in the period of transition to modernity – a pathfinder: both a forward-looking Renaissance prince and a medieval crusading knight. In the end, he was a ruthless slave trader, a position hard to reconcile with either Renaissance or Christian principles.⁵³⁰

Henry was a product of Medieval Christendom's fixation with waging holy war against the Muslim infidel and the pagan non-believer. Throughout the Middle Ages a series of Crusades – a protracted holy war between Islam and Christianity – were launched with chivalric zeal from the Holy See of Rome and royal courts of Europe with a most illustrative goal, to recapture Jerusalem from Muslim rule and restore Christian suzerainty over the Holy lands. The Crusades themselves, beginning in 1095, helped to establish the power of the papacy and its claim to be at the vanguard of the leadership of Christianity and Christendom's fight against the heathen.⁵³¹ Complicating matters was the reality that for hundreds of years parts of Europe, Portugal and Spain, were under Muslim rule – albeit of a tolerant sort. The stated objective of Islam was not necessarily the conversion of conquered people under

Muslim authority. All that was formally required of the inhabitants living within Muslim rule was their civic obedience.⁵³²

It was this history of Christendom armed against the Muslim infidel that made President George W. Bush's use of the word "crusade" on the day of the September 11, 2001 attacks, so controversial to the listening world poised for leadership: "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." Many interpreted Bush's remarks for an all-out assault on Islam, like in centuries past. Islamophobia was expressed at the extreme of the ideological spectrum after 9/11 by conservative commentator Ann Coulter who wrote in a syndicated online column several days after the Al Qaeda attacks, "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war. And this is war."⁵³³

As President Bush's position evolved and was concretized in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bruce Bartlett, a domestic policy adviser to Ronald Reagan and a treasury official for the first President Bush, warned against George W. Bush's messianism and his latter-day crusade against Islam: "He truly believes he's on a mission from God. Absolute faith like that overwhelms a need for analysis. The whole thing about faith is to believe things for which there is no empirical evidence." Bartlett concludes, "But you can't run the world on faith."⁵³⁴ At least not the United States of America in the twenty-first century. Medieval and early modern Europe was another matter.

Islamic Moors from Africa conquered the Iberian Peninsula, home to Christian Visigoths, in 711 CE. These Moors were a Berber dynasty, the Almoravids from the Southern Sahara (the people to whom the Wolofs Cadamosto spent time with in "The Kingdom of

Senega” claimed kinship.) The Almoravids called their new lands Al Andalus (Andalusia), comprising most of what is now Spain and Portugal (fig. 60). The dynasty of the Almoravids gave way eventually to the Almohádes, and they, in turn, gave way to the erudite Nasrids, whose culture was exceedingly refined. It was a time of cross-fertilization and toleration (on this, one can still encounter the Moorish influence in Portugal’s architecture, such as at the Palace of Sintra, fig. 61**Error! Reference source not found.**). All in all, combined for nearly eight hundred years there was a continued Moorish presence in on the Iberian Peninsula, unique in European history. As a result, “Crusade” had special meaning for all who dwelled upon this land.

An unintended consequence of the Second Crusade came in 1147 when shiploads of crusaders from England stopped in Portugal along their way to the Holy Lands. During their Portuguese furlough, the English knights helped Dom Afonso Henriques rid Lisbon of the Moors – it was the beginning of the Christian take-back: The Reconquest (*La Reconquista*) of Portugal. To be clear, The Reconquest should be understood not as restoration of power of the earlier vanquished Visigoth rulers, but the triumph of new dynasties and power players like the military orders of knighthood – the Orders of Christ and Sanitago – that had their origins in the Crusades.⁵³⁵ One hundred years after winning Lisbon, in 1249, with Afonso III’s capture of the Algarve (the region of the Southern coast), Portugal – again “imbued with the spirit of crusade” – successfully divested itself once and for all of Muslim rule, winning the endgame in the gradual Christian Reconquest of its territories to become an autonomous kingdom pretty much matching the borders it occupies today.⁵³⁶

In historian Malyn Newitt’s view the taking of Lisbon by the Christians outweighs the failure of the Second Crusade to secure Damascus. Not only was Lisbon an important and rich

seaport **Error! Reference source not found.** – a gateway between the northern Europe and the Mediterranean – but without the capture of Lisbon the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula was impossible. Minus the Reconquest, “the subsequent shift of Europe’s economy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic seaboard was unthinkable.”⁵³⁷ Historian Joyce Appleby calls the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula “in many ways a rehearsal of the conquests of Mexico and Peru.”⁵³⁸

Compare Portugal’s role in the Reconquest with Spain’s progress. In 1236, Córdoba, the seat of Moorish in culture in Iberia from the eighth century, and the site of the Great Mosque, fell to the Spanish Christians. True to the custom of the time a cathedral was built on top of the former mosque, previously valued as one of the stellar achievements of Islamic architecture. Only in its new guise was it possible for this massive Islamic structure to survive. The literal overlaying of one set of believers’ religious space on top of another’s serves as a metaphor for the conversion of culture that will follow the transferal of territorial sovereignty effected by conquest.⁵³⁹ The new Christian house of worship in Córdoba, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, came to be called colloquially the Mosque-Cathedral (*Mezquita–Catedral*); it denotes the very physical embodiment of the circumstances of history and culture of the site it occupies – it is some of this and some of that. And as its popular name – Mosque-Cathedral– suggests, in the Christian remodel, the mosque still prevailed in physical form in spite of the repudiation of the faith it once housed. The edifice that stands today as a melding of architectural styles and traditions is so distinctive that Unesco granted it World Heritage Status.

The structure of the former mosque utterly dominates the church – yet, even in its odd fusion, the Mosque-Cathedral is utterly magnificent. The enormous spread of its vaulting

Moorish arches with their candy-cane *voussoirs* – alternating red and white stones supported on groves of granite pillars – is a design masterpiece.

Since the early 2000s Spanish Muslims have appealed to the Vatican for the right to pray in Cordoba’s Mosque-Cathedral. More than a decade later these supplicants have been denied.

In May 2014, a citizen dispute over the management of the Mosque-Cathedral reached the President of Parliament of the Parliament of Andalusia in the form of a petition. The petitioners urged the regional lawmakers to end what they believe to be abusive control by the Roman Catholic Church and restore multicultural values to religious practice allowed inside the cathedral.

One of the leaders of the citizens’ group, Antonio Manuel Rodríguez, a law professor at Córdoba University, accused the church of engaging in an evangelical crusade to ensure that every visitor would become one of the “faithful.” He and his fellow petitioners also challenged the Roman Catholic Church’s “claimed ownership over a building that belongs not only to the general public but to world patrimony.” Mr. Rodríguez specifically references an alteration in the labeling of the entrance tickets and brochures, which now describe the structure only as a “cathedral,” obliterating any reference to the buildings origins as a mosque. This in a municipality full of signs directing tourists to the *Mezquita-Catedral*. The petition made note that citizen activists are deeply disturbed that Church practice is making the Mosque-Cathedral “a symbol of intolerance rather than tolerance.”

Church spokesman for the Córdoba Diocese, Rev. Pablo Garzón, vehemently denies such charges: “It’s false to suggest we’re trying to occult the past, but we do want to make it very clear to a visitor that he is entering a cathedral.” Nonetheless, the building’s Unesco

World Heritage Site designation recently has been called into question. Why? Thirty years ago it was the mosque (and not the cathedral) that was singled out for the honorific, much to the frustration of the Roman Catholic Church.

In the wake of Spain's drastic economic downturn in 2008, the profitability of the site as a popular tourist destination may certainly be said to be driving some people's interest in criticizing Roman Catholic Church management. It is estimated that the Córdoba diocese took in \$11.5 million last year in revenue from the proceeds of one million visitors – all tax exempt. The Church countered that conservation costs on the Mosque-Cathedral itself and general operating expenses nearly equal the money received. Still there are those in officialdom who would now challenge the Church's tax status as a charity – or, more drastically, would advocate the government seize the property.

In April 2014, the matter of expropriation was debated in the national Spanish Parliament. Spain's justice minister, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, pointed out that such a government takeover would require the state to pay significant compensation to the church, and he rejected the proposal out of hand. At least for the time being. We will have to wait and see what the future brings.⁵⁴⁰

The thirteenth century loss of the city of the Great Mosque was an enormous blow to the Moors. Only a couple of years after the demise of Córdoba, Valencia fell to the Spanish in 1238 and Seville in 1248, but it would be one hundred and fifty years before the Moors were driven out of Al Andalus altogether. Their last purchase in Spain was Granada (fig. 62). As capital of the Moors remaining holdings, Granada issued a "beacon of enlightenment" that reached its apogee in the construction of the Nasrid court palace, the incomparable Alhambra

(fig. 63) and the resplendent gardens of the Generalife, which were begun in 1248, high on a hill against the backdrop of the majestic Sierra Nevada.⁵⁴¹

Following the Reconquest of Seville (fig. 64), the reign of Castilian King Alfonso X was a brief period (1252 to 1284) wherein religion, culture, and the arts maintained the precious liberality of expression achieved under the Moors. Alfonso X employed Moorish craftsmen to begin construction of the royal palace of Seville, the Alcazár, which was completed by Pedro the Cruel in the next century. Still in use today by the royal family the Alcazár is considered the most complete example of the sophisticated and opulent *Mudéjar* (Moorish inflected) architecture in Spain. It is where Ferdinand and Isabella greeted Columbus on this return from the Indies.

Alfonso X initiated a comprehensive overhaul of the legal system and introduced a new statutory code, *Las Siete Partidas*, establishing a uniform body of laws for the realm of Castile. *Las Siete Partidas* was not advancement for the institution of slavery. The reformed Castilian juridical structure, based on Roman law, now assigned slaves (previously perceived as human beings) to a lower category of humanity than their masters in order to get around the customary prohibition against enslaving a fellow Christian. The notion of “natural slaves,” humans beings domesticated like beasts, as Aristotle had described them, was evoked.⁵⁴² “‘From the hour of their birth,’ Aristotle proclaimed, ‘some are marked for subjugation, others for rule.’”

Tame animals are naturally better than wild animals, yet for all tame animals there is an advantage in being under human control, as this secures their survival. And as regards the relationship between male and female, the former is naturally superior, the latter inferior, the male rules and the female is subject. By analogy, the same must necessarily apply to mankind as a whole. Therefore all men who differ from one another by as much as the soul differs from the body or a man from a wild beast (and that is the state of those who work by using their bodies, and for whom that is the best

they can do)—these people are slaves by nature, and it is better for them to be subject to this kind of control, as it is better for the other creatures I have mentioned.⁵⁴³

Slaves were thus defined as subordinate dependents, consigned to the legally equivalent social standing of permanent children. Aristotle's ideal of the "natural slave" as a compliant, submissive chattel, a nonhuman thing with the legal status of movable property, is the central problem of slavery. It is in reality an impossible conversion to achieve. It was a notion that ate at the heart of the very premise of Christianity – the universalism of all mankind in the acceptance of Jesus as Savior. The belief that is central to Christian doctrine, which speaks to the equality of all human souls. And the Christian precept of the universal origin of all humans as descended from Adam. *Las Siete Partidas* was "man-made" law that trumped God's law. Over two hundred years later, with the demands of Atlantic expansion, this "natural slave" doctrine was often used by both Portugal and Spain as a rationale for enslaving Africans.⁵⁴⁴ And in Europe, as slave became synonymous with blackness the human status of all sub-Saharan Africans was called into question.

The kingdoms of Aragon and Castile were brought together in 1469 with the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and the more dynastically powerful Isabella of Castile.⁵⁴⁵ Their marriage created a uniting of Christian Spain under their joint rule as "The Catholic Monarchs." This was the beginning of the formation of the Spanish nation-state: the child of Isabella would henceforth be the single heir to both crowns. Two generations later the Queen of Castile's grandson, Charles V, became the most prestigious monarch in all of Europe when through marriage alliances he not only inherited the Spanish crown but the Austrian Hapsburg one as well, adding the title Holy Roman Emperor to his credits.⁵⁴⁶ It was only in the stability created by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella that the Spanish successfully waged war

against the remaining Moorish Caliphate. For years Ferdinand and Isabella had spurned Portuguese offers to unite militarily in order to complete the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula; not trusting the Portuguese king to ultimately withdraw his armies without attempting to annex Andalusia, they bided their time and won the day.

At the siege of Malaga in 1487, which was a Catholic rout, one hundred among the remaining number of an “elite corps of 3,000 African slave soldiers,” were sent to the Pope as “a gift.” Others were sold abroad to “defray expenses.”⁵⁴⁷ The Moorish slave owners were then themselves enslaved as one from of oppression to which the Catholic Monarchs resorted. It was long-standing practice that both Muslims and Christian justified enslaving non-believers of their creed as a condition of Holy War. To insure Catholic orthodoxy, Ferdinand and Isabella established the Spanish Inquisition in 1478, to challenge the Christian faith of converts from Islam (*moriscos*) and Judaism (*conversos*). Before it was over “an estimated three million Muslims and Jews had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, and thousands died under this brutal regime.”⁵⁴⁸

Granada, the last redoubt of the Moors, led by Boabdil the Unfortunate, succumbed in 1492.⁵⁴⁹ The fall of the Caliphate at Granada (fig. 65) was a huge event in history that gets overshadowed by the other monumental event sharing that famous date – *in fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

The end of Islamic rule was also the triumph of the Inquisition: sadly, the end of Moorish civilization also meant the end of tolerance and civility. The legitimacy of Christian rulers was vested in divine ordination, therefore, the subjects of Christian rulers also had to be Christians to insure they acknowledged the legitimacy of the monarch.⁵⁵⁰ Ferdinand and Isabella took this to the extreme with the sudden and cataclysmic Edict of Expulsion that

reinforced the principles of Christian orthodoxy. Jews who did not convert to Christianity were immediately exiled. Some 200,000 Sephardic Jews left in a mass exodus to disperse across Europe. Many poured into Portugal, creating its own crisis.⁵⁵¹

A strange and cruel thing happened to some Jewish children whose parents did not follow the exacting demands of the Portuguese crown regarding their terms of entry and draconian requirement for conversion. In 1493, sons and daughters were seized from their resisting parents and sent to the African Atlantic island of São Tomé to be Christianized. There – against all odds – remarkably the Jewish children not only survived but thrived.⁵⁵² As the entire Iberian Peninsula became inhospitable to Jews others opted to join the Portuguese communities that were forming in the Atlantic islands, the few creole communities of coastal West Africa, and later settlements in Brazil where they played a large role in the development of the sugar industry.⁵⁵³ New World sugarcane cultivation had begun when Columbus initiated the production of sugarcane in Hispaniola with plants he had brought across the Atlantic from Portuguese, Madeira.⁵⁵⁴

Eventually the Muslims of Granada met such hostility that they, too, succumbed to exile. Mostly they went to Fez in North Africa, including the family of al-Hassan al-Wazzan, later known to Shakespeare as Leo Africanus, the great chronicler of Africa who influenced the playwright's conception of *Othello*. It was an *anus mirabilis* – 1492 – for the Catholic Monarchs – a calamity for the Other.

Five hundred and twelve years after the Moors surrendered Granada, on the morning of 11 March 2004, Islamic extremists with suspected links to Al-Qaeda commemorated the fall of the European Caliphate in acts of violence. Bombs exploded on four crowded commuter trains in and near Madrid, killing 191 people and injuring 1755. These radical agents let the world know that

the bombings were executed as an act of revenge for the assault on the seat of Iberian Islam in 1492.⁵⁵⁵

CHAPTER SIX: PRINCE HENRY, THE SLAVE TRADER

After success in his crusading role in Portugal's North African campaign to capture Ceuta (one of the terminal points of the trans-Saharan trade) from the Moors in 1415, Prince Henry was on a mission. In the 1430s, believing that fighting the Muslim infidel on every front was the duty of a pious Christian prince; Henry made ending the Islamic monopoly on trade in gold with sub-Saharan Africa his pursuit. In the middle of the fifteenth century, a robust trade existed across the Mediterranean between European Christendom and Muslim North Africa. The Maghreb, as the Europeans called it, was supplied by Arab and Berber caravans with goods from western Africa south of the Sahara: gold, slaves, ivory, and pepper.⁵⁵⁶ For the most part Europeans were merely purchasers and not purveyors in this trans-Saharan exchange, although some Genoese merchants and North African Jews were involved with the Muslim traders.⁵⁵⁷ Henry calculated that if the gold from African mines could be directly accessed by the Portuguese through a sea route to West Africa, thus connecting to the interior trade networks of the continent and the source of the gold – while cutting out the trans-Saharan Muslim middlemen – it would give Portugal the monopoly of the international gold market. This, the Prince resolutely set out to do.

When he plotted how to launch his radical new maritime commercial venture to West Africa, it is possible to imagine that The Navigator had in mind the riches of Mansa Musa, the king of Mali, “Lord of the Negroes of Guinea,” who was prominently featured wearing a crown and holding a huge gold nugget – on the Catalan Atlas made for a French king, Charles

V, in 1375.⁵⁵⁸ Henry's bequest to his god would be a "Crusade of Discovery." And his ships would sail not only under the flag of Portugal, but also under the Order of Christ (successors to the fabled Knights Templar), an esoteric chivalric fellowship founded to combat Islam in the context of the Crusades, for which the ascetic, avowedly celibate Prince (in keeping with the rules of the knights) was governor – a position of power, wealth and privilege.⁵⁵⁹

Henry also had faith in astrology. He believed his destiny for discovery was charted in the stars, according to Gomes Eanes de Zurara (Azurara), the royal chronicler of the Avis dynasty whose work – *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (*Chronica do Descobrimento e Conquista da Guiné*), published in 1453 – is the principle primary source of information for the early years of Portuguese expansion (fig. 66).⁵⁶⁰ It is historian Ivana Elbl's opinion that the intangibles of fame and honor were the foremost objectives that drove the Prince's plurality of motives.⁵⁶¹ The Crusade for Discovery was his means to achieve immortality.

The speculative plan was to set forth down the West African coast where no European ship had ever been before to determine the extent of Islam's encroachment into Africa and the extent of its impact. This cause would be undertaken in part with the hope that perhaps a Christian ally could be found in the heart of darkness who could help with an assault on the Moors of North Africa from the rear. Stories of just such a man – Prester John (fig. 28)– circulated throughout Medieval Europe fueled Henry's fantasy.⁵⁶²

Prester John – "a mighty (if possibly schismatical) Christian priest-king," a black East African – fascinated the romantic imagination of early modern Europeans. Enscornced in the land of the infidel, it was believed that Prester John could become a strategic ally for the West in a Holy War against the reigning Muslim powers, be they Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, or

Moors. The Prester (or The Presbyter) signified the universality of the Christian Church to European believers; his existence proved that the true faith exceeded cultural and geographic diversity by embracing all of humanity, this in an age when intercultural enmity made such a transcendence of difference seem unfeasible.

The Prester was believed to rule a magnificently wealthy kingdom that was once thought to be somewhere in central Asia but had shifted in popular consciousness to a focus on the Coptic Christian African Empire of Ethiopia situated between the Nile and the Red Sea. Ethiopia became “Christianized” as early as the fourth century – a Christian kingdom completely surrounded by Muslim neighbors.⁵⁶³ “Indeed, in many maps of Africa from the first half of the fifteenth century onwards, Prester John is represented as the principal ruler of Ethiopia.”⁵⁶⁴ Beginning around 1306 a few emissaries from Ethiopia reached the royal courts of Europe by way of Jerusalem.⁵⁶⁵ The Ethiopian delegation was seeking “a Christian alliance with the ‘King of the Spains,’ to offer him aid against the infidels.”⁵⁶⁶

Around 1375, John of Hildesheim established in his text, *Book of the Three Magi*, the key literary basis for the magus, King Caspar as a black Ethiopian. He also promulgated the notion that the Emperor of Ethiopia was heir to all The Three Wiseman because each had died without an heir.⁵⁶⁷ It is easy to see how myth and reality were conflated, as Europeans began to equate Prester John to the Emperor of Ethiopia, much to the astonishment of the Ethiopian envoys who made their way to the capitals of southern Europe during the late Middle Ages.⁵⁶⁸ The second volume of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (in two parts), takes us from “From the Early Christian Era to the “Age of Discovery.” These illustrations, along with Paul H.D. Kaplan’s *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (1982) attest to the important presence of the image of people of African descent in Medieval Europe’s visual culture.

Kate Lowe has observed that such encounters between Africans and Europeans in the fifteenth century were “crucial” in “the articulation of a whole host of cultural and religious assumptions.”⁵⁶⁹ Ethiopia with its long history of Christian culture and literacy with a vaunted tradition of “chronicle writing” enjoyed a unique status as an African civilization worthy of European respect by Renaissance Aristotelian standards.⁵⁷⁰ Class, no doubt, also made a difference in the respect the Ethiopians experienced at the Vatican and at the courts of European nobility. The Ethiopian ambassadors (fig. 30) were commonly both trusted members of the imperial household and high ranking religious dignitaries who as a courtesy were allowed to dress in the customary religious garb of their culture.⁵⁷¹ The extent to which the Ethiopian Emperor was considered an ally is reflected in the strategic dynastic unions that certain European monarchs entertained. In 1428 King Afonso of Aragon was even considering a “double marriage” with his counterpart the negus of Ethiopia. By 1452 an envoy from Ethiopia arrived at the court Lisbon, and in 1487 the Portuguese Crown sent an envoy to Ethiopia to negotiate a royal marriage. However, nothing came of any of these plans for matrimonial alliance.⁵⁷² It is impossible to document whether this was because of a hardening of racial attitudes that accompanied the emergence of Portugal’s Atlantic slave trade.

Henry the Navigator surmised that perhaps there would be a way to link up with the Prester by a mission to the western coast of Africa and then traveling east across the continent. A peripheral goal was to discover a sea-passage to the spice rich lands of the orient around the continent of Africa, which would allow European merchants to avoid having to traverse huge distances controlled by Muslim rulers and intermediaries across the Middle East. Exotic spices were the definitive luxury items of the day; desire for them spoke to ambitions for status among the European elite.⁵⁷³

It is hard not to believe that economics not romanticism was Prince Henry's driving motivation, the opportunity to establish a coastal outpost for the gold and slaves traded in the interior by way of the trans-Saharan caravan, even though it is more appealing in our desire for heroes to believe in a visionary, saint-like sage with an avowedly evangelizing Christian mission to bring the uninitiated to Christ.⁵⁷⁴

Pressed by Prince Henry, Portuguese exploration and exploitation of The Guinea Coast⁵⁷⁵ in search of gold began in earnest in the 1430s. The gold the Portuguese⁵⁷⁶ sought was indeed eventually "discovered," that is, discovered in the possession of African traders along certain coastal areas of West Africa. Within thirty years after Henry's death in 1460, when the Portuguese crown licensed the Guinea trade to Fernão Gomes, a "prosperous stay-at-home merchant," the entire length of Africa's Atlantic coast and the Atlantic archipelagoes had been explored and the gold trade discovered in Mina in 1471.⁵⁷⁷ This region, which soon became known as the Gold Coast, extends from Assine in Ivory Coast to the Volta River in modern Ghana.⁵⁷⁸ Gold is gold – an ostensibly unrivalled commodity, yet what became equally important (and eventually more so) to Portugal's mercantile success up and down The Guinea Coast (of which The Gold Coast was a section) was its lucrative monopoly of the trade in slaves, sometimes referred to colloquially as "black gold."

Prince Henry launched his maritime initiative from the small harbor city of Lagos (fig. 67, fig. 68), in the southern most region of the Algarve, where he was the seigneurial governor for the Portuguese crown and where the Order of Christ had deep regional jurisdiction.⁵⁷⁹ The story persists in hagiographic lore that Henry founded an advanced institute for the study of nautical technology, especially shipbuilding, and the art of navigation in this region. The Prince's naval academy was designed to his mariners, astronomers and

shipwrights, and also to collect and house the maps and charts, treatises of knowledge and arcana that would assist his navigators in their exploration. Henry's alter ego, The Navigator, is purported to have gathered the best Jewish and Muslim cartographers of his time to give his captains the edge. The existence of Prince Henry's school of navigation is now considered by historians to be of doubtful historicity – "a canard," according to the Prince's great biographer, Sir Peter Russell.⁵⁸⁰ But legends persist. Cultural heroes are not so easily dispensed with. Sentimental symbols of cultural belief and national identity are sometimes conveniently exempted from the rules of historical evidence.⁵⁸¹

The school for navigation (fig. 69) was putatively located near the village of Sagres on isolated and wind-swept Point Sagres, which overlooks Cape Saint Vincent (*Cabo de São Vicente*).⁵⁸² The Greek historian Strabo, writing at the time of Christ, called this geographical no man's land located at the southwestern-most tip of Portugal the end "of all the inhabited earth." To this day the site looks as if this were true. Point Sagres is a romantic and desolate spot, an austere and vertiginous promontory thrusting directly into the open sea. Henry, according to Cadamosto, had a country estate called *Raposeira* on the headland of Cape Saint Vincent. Cadamosto writes of spending a very pleasant sojourn there, enjoying the bachelor Prince's hospitality.⁵⁸³ Historians acknowledge that The Navigator was garrulous, known for staying up all night talking with his guests.⁵⁸⁴ As a young man, Henry is known to have spared no expense in hosting lavish "ludic festivities:" the jousting, feasting, and dancing of "knightly and courtly diversion."⁵⁸⁵

Point Sagres is the textbook setting for Henry's storied past: Still prey to dangerous buffeting sea winds, the view from on high is a sweeping, awe-inspiring panorama of the open Atlantic beyond Cape Saint Vincent. Point Sagres, in the cult of personality that subsumes the

Prince, was to have included (in addition to the *Villa do Infante*) as part of the overall campus – a library, an observatory, a chapel and a fort. All that remains are the chapel and the fort. The foundation of the exquisite little sixteenth-century church – the simple, whitewashed *Nossa Senhora da Graça* – was allegedly laid by Prince Henry.

With its epicenter 120 miles off Cape Vincent, it is miraculous that *Nossa Senhora* survived the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, when Henry's residence did not. This temblor, one of the most devastating earthquakes and subsequent tsunamis on human record, destroyed Lisbon and most of the archives of the period. It was a disaster on par with Banda Aceh or the Japanese Earthquake of 2012. Think cataclysmic to fathom the scale of physical destruction and human devastation wreaked on eighteenth century Southern Portugal.

On Point Sagres also stands a *padrão*, a large stone pillar inscribed with the coat of arms of Portugal with a cross on top. This *padrão* is a replica of the emblematic markers that were erected by Portuguese explorers to brand a record of their landfall during their self-identified Age of Discovery.⁵⁸⁶ As an act of laying claim to territories, erecting a *padrão* was equally a valorizing act of expansion and a symbol of appropriation.

Nearby, the restored fortress (*Fortaleza de Sagres*) (fig. 70), originally built in the fifteenth century by The Navigator, low and severe, was ransacked by the English seadog Sir Francis Drake in 1587 to break Point Sagres' hold as guardian of the Mediterranean. Legend has it that the remains of Spanish fourth-century martyred Saint Vincent were buried within the confines of its circumference and then disinterred centuries later.

Also on site, stretched out on the ground outside the fort, 141 feet in diameter, is the *Rosa dos Ventos* – a fascinating giant wind rose, or wind compass, made of stones. It is a

device used for measuring the direction of the wind, believed to have been built for Prince Henry.

Here, as in the rest of the Algarve, the ghost of The Navigator looms large. In the towns of Sagres and Lagos he is literally there in the massive bronze effigies that dominate the public squares. Henry is always depicted sporting an oversized, wagon wheel of a hat – a round chaperon in the style of the Medieval Burgundian court with its distinctive, fat, tapering tail framing his prominently mustachioed face. This image comes from the Saint Vincent Panels, fig. 19), housed in the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon. This magnificent sixtych – originally a late medieval altar piece – depicts the family members of the Royal House of Avis. A figure in black with the signature hat has traditionally been identified as Prince Henry, but as in all things Henrican, even the attribution of that portrait is now in dispute.⁵⁸⁷ Stop in for a sandwich at the *Infante Henrique* coffee shop in Sagres – just one of many toponyms that bear the name of the Prince – and experience how the locals keep The Navigator and his great maritime institute alive in encomiastic memory.

The saga of Prince Henry and his school of navigation is one of history's great marriages of myth-building and nationalism. There is logic in why it endures. Legend, with its deep roots in the national psyche, cannot be summarily dismissed when scholars make later corrections in fact, because myth serves a purpose in people's present-day lives; it is part of their collective self-imagining. Legend makes vivid what is celebratory about the past; it allows people to feel honor and pride. It is not just in Portugal that the public zealously resists the efforts of historians purveying "the truth" when it means tearing down their cultural icons. Just look at the case of Christopher Columbus. It is only in a few quarters of the population that Indigenous People's day has won out over Columbus Day in the United States.⁵⁸⁸ And

pride in Columbus is not only the purview of Italian-Americans. As Jonathon Hart comments, “Columbus, for better or worse or for both, was and is, in Hegel’s terms, a world historical figure.”⁵⁸⁹

While sharing a bite in Sagres, debunk The Navigator at your own peril.

This we know about Henry the Navigator. Astounding as it may seem, it was the ambition of this one minor princeling that single-handedly shaped the terms and the timing of the first maritime exploration of West Africa – the earliest voyages in the course of all European imperial expansion that changed the course of modern history. And he did it from an unprepossessing backwater isolated in a budding, marginal nation-state. Perhaps it is the extreme *unlikelihood* of a school of navigation in this setting that so galvanizes the myth busters. After all, it is the *unlikelihood* that Shakespeare – coming as he did from a country town with an illiterate father and no university education – could have authored his superlative literary canon that has spawned the authorship debate. The Oxfordians (as they call themselves) – a highly energized group of Shakespeare detractors are far more comfortable with the idea of an ducated aristocrat, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford as the genius behind the plays than the personage of a lowly player, the “upstart crow,” from Stratford. People will find a way to believe what they want to believe. *Did you catch the movie? It was in and out of theaters pretty quickly.*

The idea of an academy for the study of maritime science headed by Prince Henry as a nautical genius makes it easier to believe in the improbability of such an insignificant nation as Portugal to have played such a major role in the history of civilization.⁵⁹⁰ Otherwise we are left with no explanation to account for what seems counterintuitive. Historian Malyn Newitt frames the dilemma this way:

Without any great academic institutions or traditions of learning, the Portuguese had made the greatest contribution to the scientific knowledge of the world since Roman times and in so doing had launched the process of economic and scientific globalization. Although its seamen had a lot of practical experience of Atlantic navigation there were few intellectual resources on which to draw when it came to the more complex aspects of navigation, cosmology or geography... The royal chroniclers apart, few Portuguese recorded their experiences during the fifteenth century and the exploration of Africa did not generate a Portuguese geographical literature until a century later. Portugal's expansion was firmly rooted in the experience of practical seamen and in the ambitions and ideals of a class of knights and squires who served the great princes of the blood and the higher nobility... This direct participation of the crown, even though it was intermittent, has no parallels in Europe of the time and goes far to explain the long-term success of Portugal's enterprise.⁵⁹¹

As with Shakespeare, we need to examine our intellectually elitist assumptions. And like so many whose actions have lasting consequence, the fame of Prince Henry of Portugal was but a strut of an hour of contradictions upon the world's stage.⁵⁹² The Navigator was never a seafarer himself. Nonetheless, for fifteenth century Europeans, Prince Henry literally invented West Africa, an achievement that required sustained ocean-going adventuring. As for his legacy, for good or ill, Henry was the entrepreneurial visionary behind the project of Portuguese seaborne empire – and that heritage endures even if the specific memory of the seminal events he orchestrated do not survive in most parts of the world today. Still, based on public opinion polls run in North America at the juncture of a new millennium, in the year 2000, Henry the Navigator made it onto the list of the top twenty-five most important historical figures of the past 1000 years.⁵⁹³ In looking back we should examine the man in his context. We can certainly value “the historical formation of legend” even with our doubts about all the facts. Henrican myth is now indelibly part of the story. Inevitably, the historian will “oscillate freely” between legend and fact.⁵⁹⁴ The historical Prince Henry will have to co-exist alongside The Navigator, an amalgam of truth. It is inevitable that in the massive

multilingual documentary legacy of this provocative prince he will always be a “Janus figure.”⁵⁹⁵

At home, Henry has achieved secular sainthood. There have even been those who have called for his canonization.⁵⁹⁶ Today in Lisbon – symbolizing the stately prow of a sailing ship, the massive stone bulk of the Monument to the Discoveries (*Padrão dos Descobrimentos*) (fig. 71) juts aggressively – in all its futile triumphalism for a moral success story of glory lost – into Tagus harbor: Portugal is the nation never fully acknowledged for the profound influence it had on the history of the world.⁵⁹⁷ Portugal provided the systems and social structures – invented in Africa and modeled by Columbus – that created the Atlantic World. The monumental carved figure of The Navigator, as the supreme agent of Portuguese discovery, stands at the helm. Queen Philippa is there, honored as an enthusiast of expansion, a gesture to women, alongside her son.⁵⁹⁸ Prince Henry leads a sculpted pantheon of the nation’s early modern maritime explorers, colonizers, and missionaries – hoisting the all-important *padrão* of prerogative – who brought a supremacy now lost to their modest little country. In modern times, Henry as a cult figure served the repressive government that controlled Portugal from 1926 to 1974. The Navigator was the darling of a régime that was concerned more with image than truth – a propagandistic tool in the nativism of Portuguese totalitarianism. How did that project go? Consider Portugal today with its economic woes within the European Union, so eclipsed by its one-time colony Brazil. And where did all the gold go? The Irony is that though much of it was dispersed through Portuguese trade, largely with England, no one actually knows!⁵⁹⁹

Although remembrance of an illustrious historical past is celebrated and lives on in popular consciousness, the Portuguese have conveniently purged from national memory the

existence of the slave trade they pioneered and the presence of black African slaves in their cities and towns during their days of empire (fig. 72). That Portugal was a land where Islamic, Judaic and Christian influences once coexisted in a merger of cultures, with great numbers of Africans adding to the mix beginning in the fifteenth century, is long forgotten.⁶⁰⁰ This is all the more possible because that very present black population of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has long been absorbed into the mainstream white population so as to no longer register. The story of the so-called Age of Discovery from contemporary perspective is wholly a proud narrative of Portuguese achievement.

As a people, it is my observation that the Portuguese do not engage in self-reflection; they practice denial. While visiting Portugal, I was told by a public historian in Lisbon that my inquiry about the sites of the slave trade in her city was “rude.” Yet it is estimated that black African slaves comprised ten per cent of the capital’s population in the sixteenth century with such neighborhoods as the Ribera even more heavily concentrated with Africans.⁶⁰¹ Considering the population of Lisbon – still recovering from earlier decimation from the plague – was 40,000 inhabitants, compared with the export numbers of the slave trade, this is not at all an unrealistic number – in fact, it may be low.⁶⁰² During the opening period of the Atlantic slave trade (fig. 73), from 1450 to 1521, the volume of enslaved persons exported from Atlantic Africa, almost exclusively by the Portuguese, totaled 156,000. From 1450 to 1465 the annual number averaged 900; from 1480-1499 the annual average increased to 2200, and the average doubled to 4400 slaves per year during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. By this point in time, the empire was overall profitable – contributing about sixty percent of the crown’s income – and Portugal was turned into a slave society, that is, a

state dependent on the labor of slaves, rather than a society in which slaves were part of the make-up of the population.⁶⁰³

By the end of my Lisbon visit, my disapproving Portuguese colleague helped me locate the elusive footprint of the Lisbon Slave House (*Casa dos Escravos de Lisboa*), where holding pens for the enslaved and management offices of the trade were located. The Slave House stood in the vicinity of the long-gone Guinea House (*Casa da Guiné*), both off Commerce Square (*Praça do Comércio*). The physical evidence of these buildings of the slave trade, along with the all but the chapel of the royal palace, was leveled in the 1755 earthquake, wiping the slate clean.⁶⁰⁴ Panoramic artist views of the city of Lisbon prior to the earthquake, as seen from the Tagus River Estuary, and early paintings in the City Museum of Lisbon show the Slave House clearly marked (see for example, fig. 74, fig. 75)**Error!**

Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.. Just as the Slave House is gone, so are the traces of the lives the millions of Africans – their onetime presence absorbed into the DNA of today’s population. A reality equally denied and forgotten, just like the Slave House. The erasure of history when it comes to the African slave trade in Portugal is simply breathtaking. So is the erasure of memory of the Afro-Portuguese, who visibly disappeared over centuries of intermarriage and assimilation.

Only one influential critic of the early modern era dared (or cared) to criticize the Navigator, Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish Friar. But it was a generation after Henry was dead. Las Casas had come to the New World as an adventurer with Columbus on his final voyage in 1502; he became a crusader for Indian rights only after eight years witnessing the violent colonial abuses of indigenous people in the New World and entering religious orders. Las Casas excoriated Henry the Navigator “for having impiously brought war and violence to

the newly discovered lands bordering on the African Atlantic.”⁶⁰⁵ Las Casas’ views on slavery evolved from first-hand knowledge. His own father had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, and returned with a Taino slave boy for Bartolemé. When Ferdinand became uncomfortable with the enslavement of the Tainos they had pledged to evangelize as subjects living among them: Bartolemé’s Jaunito was returned to Hispaniola with a number of his compatriots. As a clergyman Las Casas’ initial condemnation of slavery extended only to Indians, not Africans. After all, Las Casas grew up in Seville where there was already a population of ten thousand African slaves supplied by the Portuguese, well integrated into professional families like his own. And from his father he inherited land in Hispaniola, which he worked with the slaves. Joyce Appleby posits that if the Spanish had “treated their slaves with care and kindness.” La Casas “might have spent his clerical career tending a flock of Spaniards and their households.” But when Las Casas participated as Chaplain in the conquest of Cuba, he witnesses a measure of abuse and barbarity that radicalized him as the vehement anti-slavery crusader we know him as today. Eventually he came to condemn all forms of slavery for all people when Las Casas was able to recognize that the suffering of Africans dying from overwork in the fields of the Americas was equal to that of the Indians.⁶⁰⁶

One Portuguese Dominican, a contemporary of Las Casas. Fernando de Oliveira, criticized to no avail the slave trade in his book *The Art of Sea Warfare (Arte da Guerra do mar)* published in 1555. Through charting Prince Henry’s story it is possible not only to study the institution of Atlantic slavery at its origin but also to investigate the construction of race as it transected the practice of European slaving. As for his personal motivation to send ships to Africa against all odds, it is safe to say that Henry was possessed of both a deep religiosity and capitalist ardor. Mostly it was an obsession for gold that drove his quest.

When Henry died in 1460 the trade with West African languished until it was picked up later in the century by King John II (*João II*) of Portugal (1455-1495). King John succeeded his father in 1477 when the old king Afonso V abdicated his throne and entered a monastery, but John II did not formally inherit the crown until 1481. The slackening of the West African trade can partly be explained by the war Portugal was engaged in with Castile between 1475 and 1480.⁶⁰⁷ While in power, John II's major purpose and achievement was to restore the policies of Atlantic exploration for which his great-uncle, Henry the Navigator was famous. Under John II in 1482, the conquest of Guinea was complete when he Portuguese built Saint George's Castle in Elmina with surprising speed – from stone blocks brought “ready-cut” that were assembled by slaves.⁶⁰⁸ Upon the completion of the Castle, King John II, with the Vatican's blessing, fashioned himself the “Lord of Guinea.”⁶⁰⁹ King John II was intent on enhancing the prestige of the African enterprise back in Portugal. And henceforth, the Spanish were put on notice that the Portugal would defend its monopoly in West Africa.

Efforts made at the Christian conversion of West Africans by the Portuguese were mixed at best, but they were more successful under John II than before. Despite their avowed intent, the evidence shows in the numbers of priests aboard Portuguese ships that the mission to minister the gospel to the native people encountered was not provided for. This is certainly because colonization did not play the role it did in the New World, with Portugal promoting a seaboard trading empire in West Africa – with ships moored at a prudent distance from the shoreline – rather than one of settlement.⁶¹⁰ The Portuguese never really got around to the mission of conversion until the middle of the sixteenth century, one hundred years after they first came ashore, and by then their supremacy was being seriously challenged by other European powers. The Portuguese clergy in West Africa were notorious for their inferior

intellectual qualities and dissolute behavior. The pay was so bad what could you expect? The Portuguese crown did not match words of proselytizing intent with the resources to get the work done; and the job itself was not an easy one under the best of circumstance. The array of cultures with their various belief systems and languages was a stunning cornucopia of diversity with which missionaries had to cope as the local people were brought to Jesus. Furthermore, the Portuguese in Africa – unlike the Spanish in the New World – had to contend not only with pagan others, but with the presence of Muslims, whose conversion had come much earlier from contact with the great empires of the Western Sudan, Mali and Songhay.⁶¹¹

The Kingdom of Kongo, adopted Christianity in 1491 and continued its practice from that time forward. The first Christian king of Kongo was Nzinga a Nkuwu who adopted the baptismal name John I (*João I*) in the presence of the Portuguese king John II. Nzinga Nkuwa's son, the future Afonso I, also converted.⁶¹² A few young men from – the sons of African elites – were brought to Portugal to be to be educated, acculturated in Western customs and manners, and baptized into the church, even as priests and ordained to return to serve in their native land.⁶¹³ One of these young men was Afonso I's son, Dom Henrique.⁶¹⁴

This practice for the non-clergy was part of ensuring a network of alliances on both sides. It made for enlightened Christianized partners for the Europeans and brought stature and sophistication to the Africans' ability to conduct business with the skills the Europeans required. European business associates standing in as Godparents for the young converts often secured such interpersonal allegiances. Since African political power was hereditary this enterprise of surrogacy was an investment that would reap benefits for generations to come.⁶¹⁵ Sometimes this gesture of supreme trust – placing a child in the care of a foreign commercial

partner – ended in betrayal for the Africans. Sometimes, for example, it was expedient for the Europeans to hold the young princes as hostages to ensure the cooperation of their fathers because there was no relying on force to secure favorable trade relations. Sometimes these young African acolytes were treated cruelly – merely out of a blatant disregard for their humanity.⁶¹⁶ This speaks to the inequality of Africans in European eyes even where race was mitigated by class.

Some attribute the motive of the king of Kongo's conversion to Christianity as having been a cynical expediency for trade, giving him advantages over his regional rivals. Later missions in the Kongo may have encountered tensions that resulted from the slave trade,⁶¹⁷ even though the king's conversion initially facilitated the trade.⁶¹⁸ Irreconcilably, the church allowed for the slave trade in Africa as a civilizing mission. It was long-standing practice that Christians justified enslaving non-believers of their creed as a condition of Holy War. Bringing the pagan to Jesus justified his or her depredation. Portugal recognized the *Siete Partidas*,⁶¹⁹ so it came to be that Africans' willingness to accept Christianity had no bearing on the Portuguese decision to trade them as human property. In a series of papal bulls issued from 1452-1456, Catholic popes actually sanctioned the enslavement of African's and Portugal's monopoly of the slave trade.⁶²⁰

Societies sanction slavery through laws. Henry “enmeshed Portugal's Atlantic expansion” – including the slave trade – in “doctrinal pretensions.”⁶²¹

In Prince Henry's first negotiations with the Holy See for his trade monopoly to West Africa, the justification for the Portuguese slave trade centered around the conversion of the “pagan” natives to Christianity. Counter-intuitively, the “most disturbing thing about the slaves from the slaveholder's point of view was not the cultural *difference* but the basic

similarity between himself and his human property.⁶²² Because of this, a deeply rooted moral ambivalence settled into the conscience of European Christians as they engaged in the slave trade. This can be seen in the contemporary account of Zurara, a Portuguese court chronicler. Writing in the mid to late 1400s in his *Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Zurara equates blackness with ugliness and servility, paganism and bestiality. Nonetheless, he acknowledges the benighted Africans he witnesses at an early slave auction in the Portuguese City of Lagos to be fellow human creatures, “remembering that they too are of the generation of the sons of Adam.” So moved is he by the suffering of those held in bondage that he weeps in pity for them: “Who witnessing this lamentable spectacle could not?” Zurara continues:

what heart could be so hard as not to be pierced with piteous feeling to see that company? For some kept their heads low and their faces bathed in tears, looking one upon another; others stood groaning very dolorously, looking up to the height of heaven, fixing their eyes upon it, crying out loudly, as if asking help of the Father of Nature; others struck their faces with the palms of their hands, throwing themselves at full length upon the ground ; others made their lamentations in the manner of a dirge, after the custom of their country. And though we could not understand the words of their language, the sound of it right well accorded with the measure of their sadness.⁶²³

This moral conflict was brought even closer to home by the values of Christian universalism. Any theoretical explanation of the so-perceived African difference had to fall into the restrictions of divine order, of *monogenesis*, the teaching in the scripture that all men stemmed from Adam and Eve.⁶²⁴ Hence, the Christian explanation for the African’s dark skin color took on a decidedly biblical interpretation rooted in an apocryphal spin on the “Curse of Ham.”

The Curse of Ham, (sometimes referred to as the Curse of Canaan), is a metaphorical myth of biblical origin (Book of Genesis) used in the early modern period as a foundation of racist ideology to justify the enslavement of Africans. With its beginnings in the

“circumstances of the Hebrews in the tenth century B.C.,” where it did not carry racial overtones – the Curse of Ham has been “a common source of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions” and has evolved as a rationale for white racist thought.⁶²⁵ There is no agreed upon biblical source text in the late medieval early modern period: “What we have is a series of readings that reflect a range of ethnic and geographical assumptions of the age,” explains Benjamin Braude.⁶²⁶ But a standard version of the narrative emerged. In short, the story asserts that Ham “saw his father's nakedness” when Noah, drunk, was uncovered in his tent, while Ham’s brothers had the grace to avert their eyes from their father’s shame. For his transgression Noah placed a curse on Ham’s youngest son Canaan that his progeny would be “servant of servants” to his brothers and their skin would turn black.⁶²⁷ It was an extreme punishment for such an innocuous seeming transgression.⁶²⁸ Nonetheless, henceforth, having dark skin signified to be cursed and to be a slave. The Curse of Ham as an explanation for slavery maintains the principal of Christian universalism by adhering to the concept that all of humankind is descended from the same family, the household of Noah, and that it is merely fate that has branded one branch of offspring and condemned them to slavery for their transgressions of behavior – not their essential difference.⁶²⁹ This fable served as the primary ideological rationale for the justification for African slavery until it was replaced by biological racism in the eighteenth century.

Zurara’s mention of the Curse of Ham in his *Chronicle of Discovery* proves that it was a concept prevalent in Portuguese culture when Prince Henry embarked on his slave raiding and slave–trading mission.⁶³⁰ William Evans sees this as evidence that “Christians began to look at blacks in ways that had been characteristic of racially stratified Muslim countries for some seven centuries.”⁶³¹ In Zurara’s account, a “noble Moor,” has been taken captive on the

Mauritanian Coast (the same Adahu we have encountered before) and proposes that his freedom be granted for a ransom of “blacks Moors.” Zurara notes that the black slaves for whom Adahu was exchanged were not – like Adahu – Muslims. Zurara comments that being “Gentiles” and not “Moors” they were better disposed “to bring into the path of salvation.”⁶³² It is interesting to note that non-Islamicized blacks in fifteenth century Portugal were still “Gentiles” when later “Europeans would call them by other names, names less connected with religion.”⁶³³ But Zurara further comments on the issue of race: These black Gentiles “I believe to have been [so] because of the curse which, after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son [“Chaim”], cursing him in this way – that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world.”⁶³⁴

Although the “Sons of Noah have been major cultural symbols...in the complex, long, and gradual process of constructing racism in Western society,” Benjamin Braude is careful to point out that “the racial identities the sons have borne have been remarkably unstable.”⁶³⁵ The tradition within which Zurara wrote about the Curse of Ham “evolved through a highly complex, constantly interactive, and subtly reinterpreting process among a huge and still inadequately examined corpus of often obscure and ambiguous ancient and medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts.”⁶³⁶ In a work as commonplace as *Mandeville’s Travels* Ham’s identity and association with a cursed black skin and slavery is neither clear nor consistent. It is only through changes in the text resulting from the process of publishing various editions and re-printings – and in multiple languages – that Ham is “Africanized” in the fifteenth century.⁶³⁷ Even a source reference to the Curse of Ham that Zurara cites in his *Chronicle* as validation that blacks are slaves by virtue of a biblical curse does not include mentions of slavery, skin color or Ham, for that matter.⁶³⁸ By the nineteenth century the Curse

of Ham was the most commonplace rationale regularly evoked by the planters of the Old South as justification for racial slavery.

Zurara's evocation of the curse of Ham in his *Chronicle of Discovery* is not just social commentary it is a political calculation that serves as a rationalization for the enslavement of black Africans. No doubt this strategy emerged from the wholly pragmatic need to justify the immediate reality that slavery during the lifetime of Henry the Navigator that had taken on a decidedly racial character.⁶³⁹

The Christian doctrine that all men are created equal was accepted in so far as it applied to the spiritual sphere and the equality of the soul. But it was not considered relevant to the more physical aspects of human existence and to relations between man and society. The primacy of society over the individual and the necessity of slavery as a social and economic institution were central to a line of thought that persisted in Portugal from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.⁶⁴⁰

CHAPTER SEVEN: 'TAKEN BY THE INSOLENT FOE,' THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Even most American college graduates would probably be astonished to learn that Portugal began importing slaves from sub-Saharan Africa in the 1440s; that well before Columbus's famous voyages the Portuguese were exploiting black slave labor on sugar plantations in Madeira and São Tomé, off the coast of West Africa; and that enslaved African migrants to the New World greatly outnumbered European immigrants in the first three hundred and twenty years of settlement.

– David Brion Davis, *The New York Review of Books* (1998)⁶⁴¹

Papal License:

Societies sanction slavery through laws. Henry “enmeshed Portugal’s Atlantic expansion” – including the slave trade – in “doctrinal pretensions.”⁶⁴² It came to be that “Africans’ willingness to accept Christianity had no bearing on the Portuguese decision to seize them as human property. Papal approval reinforced this contradiction. In fact, Papal sanction served to endorse the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans as a misguidedly “divine” “mission for Christ.” In order to off-set the inherent contradictory practice of enslaving and converting pagans rationalization – albeit – illogical was the rule. “Slavery,” it was perceived, self-servingly, by the Europeans: was a small price for the African to pay for his [C]hristianization.”⁶⁴³ It was all part of a “just war to convert heathens.”⁶⁴⁴

The bull *Romanus Pontifex*, issued by Nicholas V in 1455, was the first papal action to formally codified Portugal’s claims in West Africa in 1455 reflects not only the right to enslave people in the name of Christianity but also the concept of *terra nullius*, land belonging to no one or “empty land.” Vincent Mudimbe reads this doctrine, most commonly associated centuries later with John Locke, into the legal force the Portuguese were granted to claiming the settlement of lands occupied by *infidels* people who had no system of law or documentation of land ownership recognizable to Europeans standards of civilization. *Romanus Pontifex* shaped all the future agreements regarding native lands. It effectively nullified any claims to land ownership of non-European non-Christian people whose social and political philosophy was communitarian. *Romanus Pontifex* also established the pope’s authority over temporal Christian monarchs by granting him the suzerainty to grant the

extensive powers contained within the accord. It is the foundational document of European hegemony and colonization.⁶⁴⁵

It came to be that “Africans’ willingness to accept Christianity had no bearing on the Portuguese decision to seize them as human property. Papal approval reinforced this contradiction. In fact, Papal sanction served to endorse the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans as a “divine” “mission for Christ.” In order to offset the inherent contradictory practice of enslaving and converting pagans’ rationalization – albeit – illogical was the rule. “Slavery,” it was perceived, self-servingly, by the Europeans: was a small price for the African to pay for his Christianization.”⁶⁴⁶ It was all part of a “just war to convert heathens.”⁶⁴⁷ Yes, the Europeans wanted slaves, but they also wanted absolution for having done the right thing by their victims in order to protect their moral standing.

The justification for the early Spanish and Portuguese slave trade with Africa was the conversion of the “pagan” natives to Christianity. But, counter intuitively, because of, not in spite of the Africans’ strangeness, the “most disturbing thing about the slaves from the slaveholder’s point of view was not the cultural difference but the basic similarity between himself and his property.” (Blackburn 1997, 12–13). This was brought even closer to home by the values of Christian universalism. “For what emerges as a key focus of ‘othering’ within Renaissance depictions of Moors is behavior that paradoxically [,and alarmingly,] showed them to be like the English—behavior that might undermine England’s claim to a natural dominance and superiority” (Bartels 1990: 435). Because of this, a deeply rooted moral ambivalence settled into the conscience of European Christians engaged in the slave trade. It came to be that “Africans’ willingness to accept Christianity had no bearing on the Portuguese decision to seize them as human property. Papal approval reinforced this contradiction. In fact, Papal sanction served to endorse the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans as a misguidedly “divine” “mission for Christ”. It was perceived, self-servingly, by the Europeans that “[s]lavery was a small price for the African to pay for his Christianization.”⁶⁴⁸

Romanus Pontifex is the most important of a number of Papal bulls that stipulates the Portuguese Crowns rights and obligations with respect to the colonization of the territories it discovered in the first half of the fifteenth century through military action in Morocco and

voyages to West African and would subsequently discover. It extends the authority that Nicholas V had granted the Portuguese in the Bull *Dum diversas* June 18, 1452, and his predecessor Eugenius IV had granted in *Rex regnum* (January 5, 1443).⁶⁴⁹ *Romanus Pontifex* – or the “the charter of Portuguese imperialism,” as Charles Boxer would dub it – quite simply grants Portugal a trading monopoly in Africa and the right to conquer pagans enslave them and take their land and goods. The bull begins with a chronicle of Prince Henry’s voyages of discovery since 1419 and his efforts to colonize the uninhabited islands of Madeira and the Azores and his efforts to conquer and colonize the Canaries, (this in spite of the precedent claims of the Crown of Castile) and explore the coast of West Africa.

What the Bull achieved was the forced recognition of other European powers to Portuguese claims to sovereignty over the Guinea trade. This necessary because the Africans were not ruled by the Portuguese who had no authority to keep there noble trading partners from dealing with European rivals.⁶⁵⁰ The potency of this Bull in the beginning of the Bull was solemnly proclaimed in Lisbon cathedral on October 5 in the presence of émigré communities in the capital; French, English, Castilians, Galicians and Basques of the summoned courts of Christendom, and it was published in both Latin and Portuguese. The Prince is praised and honored in the loftiest language for his “apostolic zeal as a true Christian soldier of Christ and Defender of the Faith.” What was granted to Prince Henry was “absolute civil and religious power” with the obligation is to “spread the name of Jesus to remote territories of the world.” This includes circumnavigating the African continent to make contact by sea with the peoples of the Indies.⁶⁵¹ This bull also grants the King of Portugal, Afonso V, and his successors not only the right to colonize, but also to convert non-Christians to the Catholic faith by justifiable force and to enslave “*Saracenos ac paganos*”

(Saracens and pagans) in perpetuity” and expropriate their land and goods, in the name of God from Morocco to the Indies. Furthermore, if the native people did not convert to Christianity “it was not only a legal but also an act of faith for the colonizers to kill the natives.” The basis of this philosophy comes down through Aristotle, who not only sanctioned slavery, but who believed “all natives were meant to be subjugated.”⁶⁵²

Romanus Pontifex reflects not only the right to enslave people in the name of Christianity but also the concept of *terra nullius*, land belonging to no one or “empty land”. Vincent Mudimbe reads this doctrine, most commonly associated centuries later with John Locke, into the legal force the Portuguese were granted to claiming the settlement of lands occupied by *infidels* people who had no system of law or documentation of land ownership recognizable to European standards of civilization. *Romanus Pontifex* shaped all the future agreements regarding native lands. It effectively nullified any claims to land ownership of non-European non-Christian People. It also established the pope’s authority over temporal Christian monarchs by granting him the suzerainty to grant the extensive powers contained within the accord. It is the foundational document of European hegemony and colonization. Mudimbe, evoking the philosophy of “Natural Law,” comments that “It would be the ‘mission’ of the stronger race to help their inferior ‘brethren’ to grow up; and in any case, according to the doctrine, it was up to the most advanced race to make sure that all goods made by God for the whole of humankind should be exploited.”⁶⁵³ *Romanus Pontifex* acknowledges that through force and barter the Portuguese have enslaved a great many black Africans and brought them to Portugal where they have been baptized and embraced Christianity. The pope accepts that although this may give faith that the church may depend on the power of Christian conversion, the Bull allows the Portuguese to deny enslaved Black

African their freedom even *after* they had converted to Christianity.

This made *Romanus Pontifex* more favorable to the rights of Christian slave holders than the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X (1252–1284) of Castile. The *Siete Partidas*, Spanish Law, (based on Roman law), assigned slaves, who might still be human beings, to a lower category of being than their masters to get around the prohibition against enslaving a Christian. Under *Siete Partidas* slaves could be captured in war, born the child of a slave mother or voluntary bondage. This was “man-made” law that trumped the Christian doctrine of the universal origin that all humans are descended from Adam.⁶⁵⁴ Portugal recognized the *Siete Partidas*,⁶⁵⁵ so it came to be that “Africans’ willingness to accept Christianity had no bearing on the Portuguese decision to seize them or trade for them as human property. Papal approval reinforced this contradiction. In fact, Papal sanction served to endorse the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans as a (misguidedly) “divine” “mission for Christ.”

Through the efforts of Prince Henry, the Crown of Portugal had “become the owner of an extensive maritime domain.” Pope Nicholas V (fig. 76) – *moto proprio* – grants a monopoly over all present and future Portuguese conquest and discoveries. Furthermore the Portuguese Crown is given license to protect this extraordinary monopoly of “discovery, conquest and commerce” by whatever means necessary. All other nations are expressly forbidden from interfering in any way in Portuguese hegemony. The Portuguese are further granted permission to trade with the Saracens, “where they should find it expedient to do so,” the only prohibiting being that they may not trade in “weapons or war material” with “enemies of the faith.” King Alonso V and Prince Henry and their successors are granted the authority to build church and monasteries on their territories and send out missionary priests to administer the sacraments and bring the gospel of Christ to non-believers⁶⁵⁶ as part of the

civilizing mission. “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.”⁶⁵⁷ These dictums became the prototypes for new world expansion expressed in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1492, dividing the world into two sphere of Spanish and Portuguese rival dominion.⁶⁵⁸

The great fraud of these Bulls is that the Portuguese showed no effort to look after the spiritual well-being of the enslaved Africans. As Charles Boxer observes “hatred and intolerance...for alien creeds and races was the general rule; and the ecumenical spirit...was conspicuous by its absence.”⁶⁵⁹ James Sweet speaks to the impact:

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 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.⁶⁶⁰

Portuguese Slaving and Trading in Senegambia

In order to execute his agenda to search for the fabled gold of the Mali Empire of Western Africa, Prince Henry sponsored sea captains to brave the dangerous waters beyond Cape Bojador at the 24th parrallel, just south of the Canary Islands, whose reefs and quixotic currents had pestered sailors to such an extent that in navigators’ tradition the Cape had become both a literal and psychological barrier to exploratory sailing expeditions (fig. 77). Bojador loomed an insuperable barrier, but without passing it, West Africa would remain

inaccessible: ‘*Whoso rounds Cape Bojador, they said, will never return.*’⁶⁶¹ As a further deterrent to exploration, it was rumored that if a white man ventured beyond Cape Bojador he would be turned into a black man.⁶⁶² But most worrisome of all, Medieval sailors knew, even if they reached the coast below Bojador with all its attendant difficulty, it would be near impossible, within the limitations of the nautical means at their disposal, to buck the prevailing trade-winds and sail north again towards home.⁶⁶³

But in the age of sail, the Portuguese were the heirs to the accumulation of maritime knowledge of the late middle ages, including the works of Muslim and Jewish cosmographers.⁶⁶⁴ They had the *barca* – a small square rigged craft that could be rowed, and they developed the shipbuilding skills to produce the lateen-rigged caravel (*caravela latina*) – a craft of one to three masts with its characteristic wedge-shaped sails fore to aft. The Lateen sail was appropriated from Arab navigators in the southern-Mediterranean. They also added a mizzen, a small foremast that enhanced steering capabilities.⁶⁶⁵ The caravel (fig. 25) – like its prototype the Arab *dhow* was a light and agile ship with a stern rudder that had the capacity to tack closer to the wind than any vessel made at that time in Europe, giving its pilots greater purchase against the airstream.⁶⁶⁶

The Portuguese also had the astrolabe (fig. 78), today an arcane circular brass artifact featured proudly and prominently in the Maritime Museum in Lisbon, it was used by mariners to orient them beyond the sight of land. The word Astrolabe – derived from Persian – literally means “star taker.” The device – was designed to calculate the position of celestial bodies. In the fifteenth century, this instrument of navigation became the most important tool aboard ship for calculating the altitude of the sun and the stars to set the ship’s course.⁶⁶⁷ It had a “sighting apparatus,” which a similar gadget, the quadrant, lacked.⁶⁶⁸ Even so, valiant few had

the patience and the skill to chart a careful path forward and brave the perilous regime of wind and current that would dog the voyage of anyone risking the rewards of round-trip navigation to West Africa. To make matters worse, conventional wisdom held that fantastical creatures, dangerous sea monsters, lay in wait for the sailors who dared the waters of the Ocean Sea, as the Atlantic was called in the beginning of European maritime expansion.⁶⁶⁹ Public opinion had initially been so hostile to Prince Henry's plan that it was hard to find crews to man his ships.⁶⁷⁰

In the end, it was Gil Eanes of Lagos who on a reconnaissance mission in a *barca* opened the sea-lanes to Guinea in 1434.⁶⁷¹ Once he passed Cape Bojador, a headland extending into the Atlantic on the coast of the western bulbous bulge of Africa (today's Western Sahara), Eanes learned that the way home was to sail off in a northwesterly direction... and further still... far... far... far out to sea... to catch the Westerlies of the higher latitudes and then abruptly swing northeast for a run down to his home port of Lagos (fig. 79). This tactic came to be known as a *volta do mar*, which in Portuguese means turn of or return of the sea.⁶⁷² At what point did the captain risk this discovery – his life and the lives of his crew – on the strength of mere speculative opinion?

As proof of having made landfall in Africa, Eanes returned with a sprig of rosemary for Prince Henry from the land south of Cape Bojador:⁶⁷³ *There's rosemary, that's for remembrance... "/ Pray you...remember...*⁶⁷⁴ He did not turn black.

Prince Henry secured a monopoly from the Portuguese crown for all trade to West Africa beyond Cape Bojador; this license reverted to the crown only upon his death. In his lifetime, this did not mean that Henry personally financed all the voyages, but that he was the licensor of all trade. As the monopolist his authorization was required for any private voyage.

Many adventurers also took the risk of maritime profit; Portuguese mercantilism was an enterprise that included a range of foreign participants: Italian, English, Polish and French.⁶⁷⁵ However, based on the number of expeditions he sponsored, the Prince was, in fact, the prime patron of the early navigations.⁶⁷⁶ Henry's brother Dom Pedro was the regent to the boy king Afonso V in these years of "discovery," and it cannot be overestimated, says historian Malyn Newitt, the importance of the regents' support for the Portuguese West African expansion, although for political reasons his role was diminished.⁶⁷⁷

Under the principles of *mare clausum* – the right to treat the sea-lanes opened up by the discovery of Cape Bojodor as a navigation zone under Portugal's exclusive control – the Prince Henry sought recognition of the Portuguese royal license from the pope, and the issuing of authorizing bulls began. Saying it was so, did not always make it so in the eyes of Portugal's rivals, however.⁶⁷⁸ The Castilians in particular bedeviled the Portuguese off the coast of West Africa for years in an effort to horn in on their market share until they were decisively thwarted in a major sea battle. The Treaty of Alcáçovas, signed in 1479, resolved dynastic issues between the two powers hitherto in dispute in favor of Isabella of Castile and Castile, in turn, recognized Portuguese hegemony over the African trade.⁶⁷⁹

Twenty-odd years after Gil Eanes' first African landing, Henry outfitted Cadamosto, our Venetian gentleman merchant (*cavaleiro-mercador*),⁶⁸⁰ with a 70-ton caravel for his voyages to the upper Guinea coast in 1455 and 1456, for which the crafty prince extracted half of the profit. This split demonstrates Henry's expectations of financial reward beyond the customary "royal fifth" for at least some of his commercial projects. The royal fifth was a tax of a fifth levied by the crown on all trade to West Africa, which part of Henry's license to defray costs.⁶⁸¹ A higher levy indicates the degree of risk and expense that the Prince felt he

was incurring in these Guinea ventures beyond the normal licensing agreement. Like all caravels Cadamosto's was well designed for estuarine and river sailing.⁶⁸² And like all of Prince Henry's caravels, Cadamosto's was armed with the most advanced artillery, which the captain had no intention of using – his was a trading mission not a raiding party. But Cadamosto discovered on his first voyage to Senegambia that he was not always in control. Navigating up the Gambia River – the first Portuguese explorer ever to do so – the guns and canon came in handy. However, it was his crossbowmen who could shoot from the rigging who were most suitable in the predicament Cadamosto and his crew found themselves in. The caravel was suddenly under attack when seventeen large, oar-powered, dugout war canoes carrying 150 Mandinga (Mandingo /Mandinka) warriors rained arrows (which could be poisonous) at the intruding Europeans. The Mandinga thought Cadamosto's party was conducting a raid (*razzia*) for slaves. Having heard already from the people of Senegal about the voracious appetite the Portuguese had for acquiring human beings, the people of Gambia took that appetite quite literally to mean that the Portuguese ate the people they captured. What other explanation but that they were to be eaten upon arrival in a land far away could account for the huge number of captives these foreigners required?⁶⁸³

What a reversal of received information! It is the African who figures so prominently in the Western imaginary as the cannibal (fig. 80). Othello even speaks of human flesh feeders when he tells his own life story of “dangers passed,” how he has encountered “...Cannibals that each other eat, /The Anthropophagi” (1.3.57.). Shakespeare's source for this reference is classical: Pliny the Elder's massive encyclopedia, *Naturalis Historia*, CE 77–79, which locates Anthropophagi (literally meaning man-eaters in Greek) as dwelling in the continent of Africa.⁶⁸⁴ The world that came down to the early moderns from the ancients – Strabo, Pliny

the Elder and Herodotus – to was a world full of fantastical men and women: “Troglodytes” and “Amazons” in addition to “Cannibals.”⁶⁸⁵

Allegations of cannibalism have been used historically by Western cultures to justify – merely on speculation – the enslavement of pagan peoples who were presumed to be practicing behavior outside the bounds of acceptable human conduct. To be a cannibal was grounds for disenfranchisement from humanity. That cannibals were indeed found to be dwelling in what is now the Caribbean and in Brazil,⁶⁸⁶ gave credence to such projections in Shakespeare’s time. And by the seventeenth century African cannibals were on record, but out of the ordinary. The Imbangala of Central Africa were a cultish people who practiced cannibalism. The Imbangala in Angola, fought alongside the Portuguese forces as mercenaries in Angola from 1617 to the 1650s. There are many eyewitness accounts of the Imbangala eating the enemies they defeated in battle. One reliable witness is Andrew Battell, an Englishman who was held captive by the Imbangala in 1600–01, after having first been taken prisoner by the Portuguese.⁶⁸⁷

But in Cadamosto’s account, since the Europeans were the presumed eaters of human flesh in this context, so the Africans fought back. The physical assault of Cadamosto’s ship by the bellicose Africans was very frightening, even though the caravel had the big guns, and its sides were too high to storm. A truce was negotiated, but after the attack of the Mandinga warriors, Cadamosto’s crew demanded the ship return home. It was on this leg of the trip that the explorer in a quieter moment – before sailing up the Gambia – recorded his sighting of the Southern Cross.

Although Cadamosto was trading peaceably, he acknowledges the extent to which the Portuguese were regarded with fear and loathing for the violent slave raids they were known

to execute. The timing of Cadamosto's voyages was before the Portuguese had established their network of local forts, although the Venetian was part of the new trend among the Portuguese to trade for slaves. Already the people of West Africa also feared that if they strayed too far from home they were vulnerable to their neighbors who were becoming slavers for the Portuguese. It is notable that in such a short period of time – two decades – from 1482 when Gil Eanes first came ashore on the west African coast until Cadamosto's 1482 voyage that the Portuguese traffic in human beings had become so unutterably extreme.

The passage to Portugal from West Africa was a six-week ordeal per shipload. Each caravel would carry on average seventy enslaved Africans per voyage packed into the small hold (Cadamosto brought back 100 slaves in 1482.)⁶⁸⁸ Purposefully tight quarters to take maximum advantage of the available space, the voyage was harrowing and uncomfortable.⁶⁸⁹ The dehumanization that came to characterize the Atlantic Slave System was there at the inception. The enslaved, chained as chattels, were referred to as "pieces" (*peças*). They subsisted on a diet only of yams.⁶⁹⁰ The Africans were all registered to the Crown and then sold in the slave markets of Lagos and Lisbon, and eventually Seville (fig. 91), for domestic and foreign labor. Young Africans between the ages of twelve and eighteen commanded the highest price, with males more expensive than females.⁶⁹¹ This is precisely the nature of the crossing Othello would have taken out of West Africa on a Portuguese slaver some years later.

Cadamosto, on his second trading voyage up the Gambia a year later, in 1483, met with friendlier circumstances. The trade that the Venetian captain engaged in was mostly exchanging Iberian horses for slaves, some *malagueta* pepper, and – as it turned out, in his case – very little gold.⁶⁹² Cadamosto sailed sixty miles upriver where he encountered a

hospitable local ruler, the king of the Bati, the Batimansa.⁶⁹³ He stayed until fever among the crew necessitated a precipitous retreat. Nonetheless, Cadamosto and his team were the first Europeans to make direct contact with the great African kingdoms of Mali and Songhay in the Land of the Blacks to the west. Cadamosto did not make it, however, to the “Mysterious City” of Timbuktu. If he had, he would have seen what Leo Africanus described in 1526: a city of high culture and military might – a city of learning and laws, with rich stores full of luxury goods. That Cadamosta got so close, coming in by river from the West Coast, is tantalizing. Portuguese emissaries were sent by John II to Timbuktu later in the fifteenth century with little on record to show for it.⁶⁹⁴

As an observer of men and nature, Cadamosto’s account of the region has withstood modern scrutiny, earning him kudos as a prototypical ethnographer. Indeed his writings on the Mandinga have been credited as the first ethnohistory of a transoceanic people.⁶⁹⁵ As Cadamosto mapped capes and rivers for the first time, he was assisted by African interpreters brought from Portugal who could make themselves understood.⁶⁹⁶ Interpreters were essential on these exploratory navigations with so many languages spoken among the peoples of West Africa.

The Portuguese developed a practice, which Cadamosto helped perfect, whereby they coerced or captured native speakers for acculturation, including Christianization and language training in the metropolis. Each master who owned an enslaved person with such translation expertise, who then provided his slave as an interpreter to a ship, would receive one slave from the proceeds of the trading voyage as compensation. Through his service, after securing four such slaves for his master, the enslaved interpreter could earn his freedom. One African man, João Garrido, was captured, brought to Lagos and sold to Gonçalo Toscano. Garrido

successfully petitioned the King of Portugal himself for manumission after his requisite service. He also asked for the right to trade in slaves and gold on his own behalf. Garrido won his suit even though Toscano contested his claim. This is a noteworthy example of an enslaved man having more credibility than the man who owned him. Garrido's case, as a snapshot of the social order, demonstrates the important place Afro-Portuguese proto-linguists played as middlemen in cross-cultural trade.⁶⁹⁷

African interpreters also became adept at a Creole language that was adopted early on in Portugal, referred to as "Guinea-speech" or "black-speech": *fala de Guiné* or *fala dos negros*. Opposing theories offer that this language developed as trading tongue on the Guinea Coast or that it was a pigeon Portuguese first taught to the interpreters. Both may be true.⁶⁹⁸ One thing is clear: The Portuguese felt no requirement to learn African languages and relied heavily on a cohort of Africans who were expert in culture and translation to conduct trade between two disparate domains. The role of interpreter was a man's job. But it is not out of the question to imagine that an enslaved woman in a cohabitating relationship with a Portuguese pilot or navigator might come aboard and perform this language function. This might be feasible if the female interpreter was required to help manage shipboard captives who would include women and children. Women in certain matrilineal societies, such as the Akan had a civic status, whereas in societies that were Muslim, they would not. Engaging women as interpreters would require these socio-cultural factors to be individually considered. But over time native women as trading partners to Portuguese men became an important economic practice along the coast.⁶⁹⁹ White brides were virtually unheard of in Portuguese West Africa, where settlement was not a part of the imperial plan.⁷⁰⁰ The Portuguese who entered into the relationships were known as *lançados* (outcasts). Some were

degredados, people exiled from Portugal for various misdeeds. Nonetheless, these Afro-Portuguese families of Upper Guinea – the only region where they thrived – were cultural intermediaries, not quite of either world, and often nettlesome to the metropole.⁷⁰¹

What worked against women in the role of interpreter was the personal risk. This very dangerous job could get the slave harnessed to the task killed in hostile circumstances. And when the translators reached the capacity of their linguistic skills; it was time to turn back. Ideally, at such a juncture, the crew would take new hostages whose languages were at the time unintelligible, but who, when trained, would advance the Portuguese interest with the new language group further down the coast, and so on. Cadamosto describes how he captured one man from a people in the Gambia that could not be understood. The man was brought for an audience before Prince Henry, who had established the policy that translators be apprehended on the voyages he sponsored. A female slave (not even one of the Prince's household) was finally found who could communicate with him, but through a third language they both knew. This man who was captured as booty for his linguistic potential has a rare story, because he was eventually returned home.⁷⁰²

The Portuguese even kept one of the horses they brought for trade for the purpose of tracking down marks who tried to outrun their capture, so essential was it to maintain this linguistic system. Columbus, who knew this model, adopted it on his voyages to the Indies. And so as not to be misrepresented or traduced by a servant of the foreigner, African rulers cultivated their own interpreters.⁷⁰³ So did every other nation that established trade along the West African Coast. The first records we have of West Africans brought directly to England in 1555 were to be trained as interpreters for Tudor voyages.

No doubt learned from the Portuguese, Columbus adopted this practice of kidnapping

indigenous people as interpreters in the New World. When in the spring of 1493 he returned from his first voyage to the Caribbean islands he carried back twelve Taino natives, only six of whom survived and were presented at court to Ferdinand and Isabella.⁷⁰⁴

Black Atlantic Identity Formation

Cadamosto's appreciation for the misunderstandings of intercultural encounter were unusual for a European of his day; he had a rare capacity to imagine circumstances as perceived from the point of view of the African. Here is an account of one such episode:

It is asserted that when for the first time they saw the sails, that is, ships, on the sea (which neither they nor their forefathers had ever seen before), they believed that they were great-birds with white wings, which were flying, and had come from some strange place: when the sails were lowered for the landing, some of them, watching from far off, thought the ships were fishes. Others again said that they were phantoms that went by night, at which they were greatly terrified. The reason for this belief was because these caravels within a short space of time appeared at many places... Perceiving this, they said amongst themselves, 'If these be human creatures, how can they travel so great distance in one night, a distance which we could not go in three days?' Thus, as they did not understand the art of navigation, they all thought that the ships were phantoms... And from this it may be judged how strange many of our ways appeared to them...⁷⁰⁵

Did these words touch Cadamosto as they touch the modern reader's sensibility? Even though he authored them, it would seem not. For all his sensitivity to difference he records on both of his expeditions, never once in the many pages of his *Voyages* does Cadamosto express any empathy for the plight of the enslaved persons he purchases, nor does he concern himself with the morality of the slave trade, nor the conditions of the enslaved. It would appear from his writings that none of the above evoked in him a second thought. Earlier, Cadamosto has clearly displayed that he is immune to any empathy for the enslaved girl he holds captive and

whose defenseless tender body he violates in the cabin of his ship. How soon will it be before he discards her and takes up another, and yet another in her place? Most will ascribe Cadamosto's affect to the context of his life and times and the attitudes of his contemporaries – but to write history of the human condition is to share in the present of one's subject. Suffering cannot be reasoned away. "Past and present are bound together in a interpretive act we call History." ⁷⁰⁶

Nor did Prince Henry ever betray a sense of conscience for having engineered the beginning of European slave mongering, although he was famous for his Christian piety. Upon his death in 1460, Henry did not emancipate the Africans he enslaved in the course of his trading ventures.⁷⁰⁷ Portuguese godliness translated into "[h]atred and intolerance, not sympathy and understanding for alien creeds and races;" as a "general rule... the ecumenical spirit... was conspicuous by its absence,"⁷⁰⁸ observes the celebrated historian Charles Boxer. The right to destroy and punish the heathen or infidel and enslave so-called base peoples was not just tolerated as expedient, it was morally just, even righteous. Historian J. H. Plumb, speaking of Henry and the merchants and captains he enlisted, comments: "it is easy to underestimate the ferocity, the savagery, the compulsion that drove these remorseless men."⁷⁰⁹ Contrary to common opinion, Plumb flatly concludes: "The Portuguese were intensely racist."⁷¹⁰

In mid-fifteenth century Portugal, points of reference were established for future discourse on race and slavery and for future debates that were to tax theologians, jurists, and statesmen in the sixteenth century, preoccupy thinkers of the Enlightenment, and take on nationalistic tones in the nineteenth-century polemic over the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.⁷¹¹

In 2010, when I was introduced to the Ghanaian government curator of Saint George's castle, the first Portuguese trading outpost on the West Coast of Africa about which I have

been writing, and which is now a UNESCO World Heritage site in Ghana – the official asked me what I was doing in his country. I told this gentleman that I was researching the seminal Portuguese presence in West Africa in the fifteenth century. “Are you Portuguese,” the curator asked me. “No,” I replied, “I am American.” spoken with the weight of my own cultural responsibility. “Good. You are welcome,” he replied. “Everyone is welcome here except the Portuguese. We can forgive everyone else, but not the Portuguese.”

Expanding horizons in the formulation of the Black Atlantic in the early modern period meant that not only culture but also personal identity is unstable and mutable. The encounter with the diversity of mankind was a challenge to one’s orientation to self. In this arena, the non-European other would be expected to make all the accommodations. Shakespeare’s *Othello* in its progressive investigation of racial meaning is a reflection of the continent of Europe’s most profound identity crisis contemporaneous with the beginning of the modern era from which we have still not recovered: the world is not flat, and white people are not at its center. It was concerns for this cosmographic shift in global repositioning that Europeans adopted their reflexive posture of racial superiority based on *whiteness* as a strategy to protect themselves against a potential loss of prestige. As Edward Said suggests, “it can be argued that the major component of European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples of the world.”⁷¹² Like all racial regimes the Europeans constructed a social system in which race operates as “a justification for the relations of power.”⁷¹³ Europeans, straining the difference between themselves and non-Europeans, could convince themselves that Africans and New World natives were not human. Surely whites and non-whites could not share a common origin. In spite of Christian teaching

of monogenesis, humankind could not be conspecific in European thought; it was too degrading. Confronted with the uncomfortable challenge of human diversity, there were some Europeans who toyed with the concept of multiple creations, but the majority of Christians retained their belief in Genesis and the core precept that all humankind sprang from Adam and Eve.⁷¹⁴ Still, the further they could distance non-Europeans from themselves the easier it was to exploit them. That would include sexual exploitation. It is also a paradox of encounter that Europeans desired the very people they demonized.

The European white Christian male – invested in his own superiority and vested with imperial and patriarchal authority – established himself as the norm, consigning everyone else to a taxonomy of difference based on degrees of perceived deviation from him as the standard in all categories from phenotype to religion. At the bottom of the order, he placed his inverted self, the pagan black African, whose face became synonymous in the Atlantic world with bondage as much as the European's became associated with personal liberty and power. The European then harnessed his creed and his Christian God to rationalize and justify these actions: aberrations, especially in something as evident as skin color, must be a sign of defect and God's disfavor. Furthermore, Christians – rather than decide on a consistent and sustained basis that the souls of non-European peoples needed to be saved – saw their service (even their sacrifice) to the interests of the higher cause of Christendom as justified.⁷¹⁵ The right to human status, which conversion to Christianity should have conferred, was simple ignored when it came to the rights of enslaved people who were converts to Christ. Because even the converted continued to require domination due to their deficiencies of intellect and character that were arbitrarily attributed to them. Debasement of the other was the justification for physical exploitation. The European's legitimacy to set the rules was predicated upon a false

ideology of natural prerogative, established through force, abetted by technology (much co-opted from the Arab world): the power of ships, armor, horses, and guns and gunpowder; precise instruments of navigation and science; writing and tools of literacy – the printing press.

European identity was obdurately changed by the Black Atlantic. Europeans quite simply felt superior to all the foreign peoples the encountered. Indian mythologies featuring white gods played into that.⁷¹⁶ This left the European with a “self” defined only by his negative relationship to the other – his subjective self, nothing without a demonized object as its foil. Today, as a consequence, American identity construction also is defined by what it is not – its privileged place in the social order valid only in reference to the presence of people without the attribution of power – people of color. Author Toni Morrison writing in *Playing in the Dark* describes this dynamic as a conception of self, which is predicated and dependent on dominance. Subjugating blackness allows whites to practice identity, to act out their carnality on the debased black body. Through “Africanism” the white self knows itself “as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution; but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.”⁷¹⁷

Where does this leave the black man’s sense of his subjective self? Understandably, he has constructed himself historically in response to white suppression. The black person as other is constructed to be serviceable to the traditionally dominant group. In Hollywood this “serviceable other”⁷¹⁸ has come to be called – through the invention of Spike Lee – “The Magic Negro:” the character whose function it is to help white people find the better angels of their natures. It is a white-consciousness-raising-kind-of-thing with the black person as

change agent. Think of the black maids in *The Help* who provide extraordinary service, both literally and spiritually, to their white employers. There are many examples but certain Sidney Poitier films – *Lilies of the Field*, *To Sir With Love*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* – are prototypical; they set the standard and have been wildly popular with white audiences. In developing this *leitmotif* film director Lee asks sardonically, “How is it that black people have these powers but they use them for the benefit of white people?”⁷¹⁹

The magical negro archetype, was disconcertingly applied to then presidential candidate Barack Obama by a movie and culture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, David Ehrenstein in 2007: “Obama’s fame right now has little to do with his political record or what he’s written in his two books, or even what he’s actually said.” Rather, Obama was viable as an unexpected contender for the presidency because whites were projecting their “fantasies of curative black benevolence” onto him. In Ehrenstein’s reasoning, like all Magic Negroes, Barack Obama is a non-threatening black hero designed to assuage feelings of white guilt caused by the institution of slavery and the persistent injustice of racial prejudice in America. President Obama as an expiating figure is forgiving, inclusive and non-judgmental – a savior figure.⁷²⁰ But he must always conform and perform to white expectations.

Social psychologist Edward E. Sampson, who coined the signifier “the serviceable other,” explains the act of ventriloquism that is the functional dynamic of such an exchange. “In order to provide this service, the other cannot be permitted to have a voice, a position, a being of its own, but must remain mute or speak only in the ways permitted by the dominant culture.” This state of being or – rather I should say *beinglessness* – easily evokes metaphor. Author Ralph Ellison famously wrote about invisibility rather than voicelessness in his revolutionary, 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*. Ellison addresses the way in which white people

have inauthentically created what it means to be black as a representation of their own culturally legitimized perspective of whiteness. As such the black man is rendered invisible, robbed of his own individuality, his positive identity, his personhood.

Conversely, Sampson offers, if the Other were allowed his visible presence and entitled to express his own point of view, “the entire scheme of Western civilization would collapse.”⁷²¹ Or, as in the case with Othello, the Other would have to be destroyed. Othello is the protagonist of the play, the title character of a Shakespearean tragedy, which confers upon him a singular status – he is not the “serviceable other” or the “magic negro.” He is the hero, in his own right, possessed of autonomy. Othello is individuated: his unique personality fully developed. He asserts his personal authority, and has an independent voice; Othello does not censure himself. Does the world reflexively collapse due to this brave expression of this black man with agency? Yes. Self-preserving social forces, expressed through Iago, drive Othello to self-immolation as an ordered white society within which he has asserted his legitimacy caves in on him. Othello’s fatal flaw is that in this process he lost his rudder – his “double consciousness.”

Paul Gilroy includes a powerful emblem of identity construction, “double consciousness,” in the very title to his 1993 treatise – *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* – in order to express its importance as an idea that relates to what Joseph Roach calls “the self-reflexive interaction of identity and role.”⁷²² Double consciousness is quite simply a performance of identity for the black Atlantic traveler who must straddle two realms of existential reality: self and Other. Gilroy adopts the term from the great African American historian and philosopher, W.E.B. Du Bois, who expounded his classic social model of double-consciousness as early as 1903. What follows are Du Bois’

words. He speaks in the idiom of his time of being caught between the self-conception and the outside perception of being an American and at the same time a person of African descent:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

He continues:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost... He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.”⁷²³

For the black man living in the white world – any white world over time and space – double consciousness is not an abstraction it is not just a potent idea – it is state of being. He lives in and of two worlds and occupies the space in between them. If the central Manichean dilemma is between black and white, his limbo is shaded a murky grey.

Othello's journey is the story of a black man operating with Du Boisian double-consciousness in Gilroy's metaphorical “sea voyage” of the early modern Black Atlantic world. Like all black man before him and after who live in a white world Othello is “measured,” as Barack Obama notes of his own experience in his memoir *The Audacity of Hope*, like “members of every minority group...largely by the degree of our assimilation.” Like Cadamosto's interpreters, Othello is a go-between: he bridges the worlds of Africa and Europe in their earliest meeting. Othello is an exemplar of a new global order: a displaced person of here, there and everywhere; yet, as a military commander, Othello is a cosmopolitan traveler. His is a story of black exceptionalism – another Du Boisian precept – that frames the

notion certain individuals succeed and refute the processes of destruction leveled at them. This truism should have made for a happy ending to Othello's story.

Having been nobly born in Africa, Othello – although once enslaved – through his heroic deeds as a soldier – regains elite status; what is more, he never loses his innate sense of class, which explains the success he has in his adopted world. Unfortunately, class-gains for a black man come with the attendant risk of increased exposure to power – to whiteness. Succeeding within white society for a black man such as Othello, leads to greater scrutiny; and greater scrutiny prompts envy, creating the opportunity to experience discrimination more insidiously – if not overtly. Racism is crafty. It is most ardent when it is a seducer – not an enforcer – when it infiltrates the recesses of the self and feeds doubt. Success for Othello is a double-edged sword. Success depends on his deft performance of Black Atlantic double consciousness. For him to execute this constant navigation between identity and role – particularly at the levels of upper-crust Venetian society – is “to exhaust the subjective resources of any particular individual.”⁷²⁴

It is no wonder that Othello's love and trust are so easily played upon in the course of Shakespeare's drama by a boon soldierly companion – a junior officer, Iago, with whom he has shared his career on the battlefield – a man who time and again, Othello, has certainly trusted with his very life, and vice versa. Yet, Othello as a racial outsider has only a mediated experience of power. His elite standing is not native to the society he functions within. As someone not born of the place, he does not have the nuance of innate cultural insight to recognize the raw nerve his superior accomplishments as a black man – in a society that would by custom deny him preferment – have touched in his nemesis, Iago.

The depth of hypocrisy and duplicity in his Janus-worshipping Ensign is simply

impossible for Othello to imagine because of the bonds of brotherhood they have shared as comrades in arms.⁷²⁵ How could he go there when the power of the state has told him he belongs – has richly rewarded him for his efforts to assimilate? Othello mistakes expediency for acceptance. And why not? Othello has moved well among the world of politics; he has made good use of social and cultural resources; he has knit them and unknit them; and he has knit himself into them in order to survive, and even thrive.⁷²⁶

“I decided long ago to achieve as an act of defiance – to define my own destiny and refuse to have it defined for me.” Could these not be Othello’s words expressing an operative maxim for a black man succeeding in a white man’s world? Could they not be the words of any successful black man at any time in history? For that matter, could they not be the words of Barack Obama located in his autobiographical texts? They are in fact the words of Charles M. Blow, an African American journalist and at the time of this writing an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.⁷²⁷ But back to Shakespeare’s words to describe Othello.

The Moor is of a free and open nature, / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so (1.3.). It is Othello’s over-confidence in steering his own interstitial reality that ultimately undoes him. He underestimates the impact of crossing the color line to marry into whiteness. This is his fatal flaw. Othello is tragically inattentive to the protective shield of his double-consciousness.

That Shakespeare, an English playwright could think to construct such a figure of the African diaspora out of his imagination speaks not only to the poet’s genius but also to the effect of the Black Atlantic. What was England’s consignment to Othello’s emergence in this teeming early modern world culture? What forces impelled Shakespeare’s invention? What role was this outlying island kingdom playing on the world stage?

CHAPTER EIGHT: SLAVERY AND MODERNITY

David Eltis' poses in his book *The Rise of African Slavery* (2000): "Why were the countries with the most developed institutions of individual freedom also the leaders in establishing the most exploitative system of slavery the world has ever seen?"

More than a century and a half before 1619 – the date that students of American history are taught the first "Negroes" were brought to Jamestown by a Portuguese slaver – ⁷²⁸ Portugal launched the birth of the European Atlantic slave market in 1441, importing black slaves from West Saharan Africa directly to its shores. Soon after, on Portuguese plantations on the Atlantic islands of Madeira and in São Tomé and Príncipe (off the coast of West Africa), entrepreneurs began exploiting enslaved Africans for their labor. ⁷²⁹ Slaves coming from the African mainland soon exceeded the capacity of the island, so they were sent on to European markets in Lisbon, Valencia and Seville. ⁷³⁰ This was the beginning of the system of slavery that would transform the world. This activity was the prelude to the importation of Africans to Portugal's possessions in Brazil and Spain's colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas, launching the industry of African slavery that grew exponentially throughout the New World, which the transposed plantation system required. ⁷³¹ "Over time," historian Alan Taylor notes, "race loomed larger... as the fundamental prism for rearranging the identities and the relative power of the many peoples in the colonial encounters."⁷³²

American history is inflected with controversy, the racially based institution of chattel slavery – the most punishing, and dehumanizing system of domination and oppression inflicted by one people on another – chief among the storm. ⁷³³ Slavery as an American social injustice is an atrocity that evokes a crushing gamut of emotions: horror, rage, guilt, denial,

and shame. The legacy of American slavery is ever-present (fig. 81); it inevitably informs the discourse around race relations in our culture even though so many would like to think that we are over it. But much is rightly made of the continuing moral dilemma of slavery's role in our country's history: the great American paradox of slavery and democracy co-existing at our nation's founding in the so-called Age of Reason. The theme of America's existential crisis was introduced into American historiography by historian Edmund S. Morgan and made the subject of his seminal text, *American Freedom, American Slavery: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975) (fig. 82) **Error! Reference source not found.**⁷³⁴ It is this American paradox that moved Noble-prize-winning author Toni Morrison, to observe, "As the sociologist Orlando Patterson has noted, we should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery, we should be surprised if it could not. The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery."⁷³⁵

“Social Death”

Orlando Patterson, quoted above, is known best for equating slavery with the concept “social death:” the condition of being a people not accepted as fully human in the society within which they live. A people thus politically and culturally disenfranchised from their civil rights. Slavery is then understood more as a transaction of power rather than of property ownership.⁷³⁶ To the modern reader this is a concept so incongruous to our celebration of America's founding principles of liberty and justice for all, it fogs the onetime nobler dream.

Even a slaveholder like James Madison could consider the enslavement of Africans America's “original” sin.⁷³⁷ But is it possible to conceive of a greater hypocrisy than Thomas

Jefferson's now much publicized (thanks to legal scholar and historian Annette Gordon-Reed) cohabitating relationship with a woman he owned, Sally Heminges, and their children, whom he kept enslaved?⁷³⁸ Jefferson is such a disappointing figure because as one of the most enlightened men of his time – he did after all pen the opening line to the American story: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* But as writer and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates, points out, we are ignoring a paradox: “If Thomas Jefferson’s genius matters, then so does his taking of Sally Hemings’s body.”⁷³⁹

Jefferson knew the wrongs of slavery: he knew that slavery’s damage is not restricted to the enslaved, but that it harms the slave owner too. That racist ideology and absolute power corrupted the values, reason and conduct of the master turning him into a tyrant who possessed shattered and tamed human beings.⁷⁴⁰

I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a beast.

– Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

In Steve McQueen’s brilliant and unremitting 2013’s film adaptation of Solomon Northrup’s 1853 autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave*, starring the incomparable Chiwetel Ejiofer as the author, the enslaved Northrup is persecuted by just such a tyrant. The true-life account of Northrup, a free black man living a middleclass life in Upstate New York, enforced descent into slavery is on film so brutal it is nearly impossible to watch with replete as it is with whipping, rape and lynching. McQueen’s historic Academy-award-winning *12 Years A Slave* is a remarkably accurate portrayal of life in the slave society of the Old South.

It vividly brings to life the culture of violence that slavery engendered. Emotionally harrowing, *12 Years a Slave* relentlessly details the savagery of a slave-holding planter class made toxic by its own debased immorality through the pathological practice of spiritual and corporeal degradation of other human beings. Bottom feeders gorged and gorging on wealth and power, the two most corrupting forces in human history.

After having been cruelly betrayed and kidnapped by a pair of cowardly charlatans, Northrup, a free black man, is sold into slavery and brutally forced to labor for twelve long years before his redemption and return to his family. It is Northrup's worse luck to endure bondage transported to the killing cane and cotton fields of Louisiana as the property of a brutal and particularly depraved young master. The planter, Edwin Epps – a dissolute, tortured and torturing excuse for a man – is shockingly brought to life by actor Michael Fassbender. Epps' lustful fixation on an exquisite young slave woman, Patsey – portrayed by the heartrending Lupita Nyong'o – is a sick-making study in sadistic predation.

In an emotional speech accepting her 2014 Oscar for best supporting actress, the luminous young Kenyan actress, had this to say about her very first film role right out of graduating the Yale School of Drama:

Thank you to the Academy for this incredible recognition. It doesn't escape me for one moment that so much joy in my life is thanks to so much pain in someone else's. And so I want to salute the spirit of Patsey for her guidance. And for Solomon, thank you for telling her story and your own. Steve McQueen, you charge everything you fashion with a breath of your own spirit. Thank you so much for putting me in this position, it's been the joy of my life. [Tears, applause.] I'm certain that the dead are standing about you and watching and they are grateful and so am I...

When I look down at this golden statue, may it remind me and every little child that no matter where you're from, your dreams are valid. Thank you.⁷⁴¹

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni

Morrison describes the American planter class – of which Epps is a model – as displaced men who saw themselves as exemplars of a “civilized” Old World culture, but who were soon possessed of a newfound savagery within, based upon a novel construct – the projection of the New World as “a raw and savage” land “peopled by a non-white indigenous population” that could only be tamed through the labor of “a bound and unfree, rebellious but serviceable black population” that had to be mastered. For the privileged “new white male” in America the savagery that is “out there” became the rationale for his committing unspeakable acts, inflicting unmitigated human suffering. Savagery was called for in the requisite disciplining of those he viewed as the irrational, nonhuman “other.” It was his bound duty as he saw it to use force as a remedial tool. That impulse (the master told himself) guided the cruel hand that administered his lash – not any savagery – in all its extreme physical violence, perverse sexuality and twisted Christian religiosity – that could by nature be attributed to him (and even his wife).

In his slave narrative Simon Northrup himself – from his unique perspective as both free man and slave – speaks to this nature versus nurture dialectic of the abuser with understanding:

“It is not the fault of the slaveholder that he is cruel,” Northrup writes, “so much as it is the fault of the system. He cannot withstand the influence of habit and associations that surround him. Taught from earliest childhood, by all that he sees and hears, that the rod is for the slave's back, he will not be apt to change his opinions in maturer years.”⁷⁴²

In truth it was not just cultural conditioning, but the master’s terror – his fear of failure, of inadequacy, of powerlessness in the face of blackness – of otherness – that made him such a brute. This truth cannot be ignored as a facet of the American character. Even in its more benign form – a hypocritical, soul-sapping paternalism. Nor can it be ignored that as a

consequence of this truth, this history, that it so evolved that to be American is to be white. In Morrison's words: "The distinguishing features of the not-Americans was their slave status, their social status – and their color."⁷⁴³

David Brion Davis bolsters this point in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (2014) in which he affirms that the white enslaver projected onto the enslaved black population the traits they suppressed in themselves. Thus, if the slaveholders chattel represented "the finitude, imperfections, sensuality, self-mockery and depravity of human nature," it only served to amplify "the opposite qualities in the white race."

We have in this perspective the underpinnings of a complex and contradictory past. We are left with an American ideal of freedom and opportunity that was inextricably bound to a pretext of white superiority. A position of racial privilege juxtaposed against the subjugation – even "animalization" – of people of African descent, who must be domesticated to root out their native savagery, lest otherwise they revert to a state of native, vengeful violence.⁷⁴⁴

Racism based "on the emotional need to measure one's absolute freedom in inverse relation to another's absolute slavishness," historian Greg Grandin writes in *The New York Times*, "didn't die with chattel slavery, instead evolving into today's cult of individual supremacy, which, try as it might, can't seem to shake off its white supremacist roots."

This helps explain those Confederate flags that appear at conservative rallies, as well as why Tea Party-backed politicians like Sarah Palin and Rand Paul insist on equating federal policies they don't like with chattel bondage. Believing in the "right to health care," Mr. Paul once said, is "basically saying you believe in slavery."⁷⁴⁵

From January 27th through October 14th, 2012, a full-body sculpture of Thomas Jefferson greeted visitors at the entrance to an exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Behind Jefferson's statue –

stenciled in white letters on a brick red wall – were the names of all the slaves who served Jefferson at his Virginia estate (fig. 83). Through this naming act, identity was returned to the hitherto marginalized anonymous African Americans who Jefferson owned through the course of his lifetime (fig. 84)**Error! Reference source not found.** This emblematic display, *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty*, sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation attempted at a site of public history and memory to confront head-on the dilemma of slavery as a shameful Jeffersonian contradiction. Furthermore, all the corroborating DNA evidence – recently come to light – that supports Thomas Jefferson's paternity of Sally Heminges' children (fig. 85) was presented to the public as the final act of a nation's acceptance of a long-hidden, scandalous (that is in its previous denial) reality.

That unions between blacks and whites in America have historically been driven into the shadows is not a matter of "social sorting that is racial," "primitivism," nor "tribalism." It is a matter of Thomas Jefferson, in 1769, seeking to pass a law banishing any white woman from Virginia who had a child by black man. In short, it is a matter of racist policy pushed by intelligent, and otherwise, sage men.⁷⁴⁶

With slavery enshrined in its Constitution, America's very character based on freedom as its core value was compromised from the start. It is a conceptual and moral travesty. Inexorably, race defines American civilization. The problem of slavery may have been settled in the United States with the Civil War but not the problem of racism. As Edward Sampson presciently observes: "How much easier it is to deny subjectivity to those who have survived our abuse."⁷⁴⁷

The theatricality of historymaking is to narrate the paradoxes of the past out of the paradoxes of the present in such a way that our readers will see the paradoxes in themselves.

– Greg Denning, *Performances* (1996)⁷⁴⁸

Today every effort is made to deny Americans cause for such introspection. It takes

intrepid columnist Charles M. Blow, writing in the OP-ED pages of *The New York Times* (November 30, 2013), to remind us: “Misogyny and sexism, racism and income inequality, patriarchy and homophobia and heteronormative ideals course through the culture like a pathogen in the blood, infecting the whole of the being beneath the surface.” Yet the reality that we live in an ongoing system of gender, race and class oppression is buried beneath the current, politically manufactured, conventional wisdom of the right that asserts in twenty-first century America we are presented with an equal playing field with each of us in charge of our own destiny in an equitable post-racial, post-feminist, egalitarian society. Logically it follows in such a mythology that if opportunity is available to all through an open social order, then to be disadvantaged must be a choice. Ergo, people are poor because they choose to live off government handouts out of fecklessness – a reluctance to make the effort to pull themselves up by their bootstraps because being on relief is preferably to working for a living. Speaking for those dispossessed in America, “often as a result of historical injustice and systematic bias,” Blow writes, “[i]t is incredibly dispiriting when people are dismissive of the barriers we must overcome, simply to make it to equal footing.” And he notes how intrepid disadvantaged Americans truly have been in their struggles to rise above their circumstances: “History is cluttered with instances of the downtrodden lifting themselves up. The spirit and endurance that it requires is not a historical artifact, but a living thing that abides in each of us, part of the bloodline, written in the tracks of tears and the sweat of toil.”

Of an earlier unnerving moral contradiction in the progress of Western Civilization, less is said. Simultaneously you have developing, on the one hand, the Renaissance, a modern idea defined by its investment in the efficacy of the human condition, and on the other hand you have the iniquity of the revival of the anachronistic institution of slavery, which had died

out in Northern Europe, with a stout reinvestment in human bondage in the Iberian Peninsula.⁷⁴⁹ “The conjunction of modernity and slavery is awkward and challenging, since the most attractive element in modernity was always the promise it held out for self-realization,” observes historian of slavery Robin Blackburn.⁷⁵⁰ Ancient, Medieval and early modern slavery were equally dehumanizing and morally reprehensible but modern slavery was unique in that it did not derive from domestic need internal to a society; it was invented purely for profit; to serve the needs of Europe’s burgeoning empires.⁷⁵¹ As Diderot later remarked: modern slavery “is a trade which is based upon injustice and has only luxury as an object.”⁷⁵² Now on a scale never before seen slavery was back: and now it was wholly color-based. Blackness and slavery would forever be inalterably intertwined in the European mind. And it was the countries of Europe with the most progressive institutions of personal liberty that adopted the most exploitive slave system ever known to humankind in their colonies.

If slavery is a feature of modernity than Capitalism is the framework that contains it. Would there have been Capitalism without black African slaves?⁷⁵³ Historian Eric Williams would say no. The wealth of the industrial West is predicated on the exploitation of African slave labor. In 1944, in *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams was first to cogently identify the connection between slavery and the economic development of the West. There would not have been an Industrial Revolution without the enslaved. His still controversial thesis has been refined by Patrick Manning in a way that circles the wagons in order to resolve the dispute and still preserve William’s core belief: “The reformulated Williams’ thesis would then argue that slavery throughout the Atlantic system contributed to the rise of capitalism in Europe and the Americas, and that capitalism in turn brought about the destruction of slavery throughout the Atlantic.”⁷⁵⁴ Manning avoids the issue of the economic viability of slavery,

that is, when did slavery become outmoded means of production, which was inevitable.

Although slavery involved the international trade of staple crops, it could not be considered truly capitalist because the laborers who produced the crops were slaves, as such, there was no negotiated free market exchange of labor for wages.⁷⁵⁵ Industrial labor could be defended on the premise that, whatever its flaws, it was at least free.

Historian Walter Johnson, author of *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, in 2013 also asks, “What was the role of slavery in American economic development?” His response? Everything.

The mobility and salability of slaves meant they functioned as the primary form of collateral in the credit-and-cotton economy of the 19th century. It is not simply that the labor of enslaved people underwrote 19th-century capitalism. Enslaved people were the capital: four million people worth at least \$3 billion in 1860, which was more than all the capital invested in railroads and factories in the United States combined.⁷⁵⁶

Both slavery and capitalism are foundational features of the age of vibrant imperialism.⁷⁵⁷ It was on the backs of slaves and the backs of their enslaved children and their children’s children – and so on down the generations – that the first mass markets in the world’s economy for international goods – sugar, rice, tobacco, coffee, chocolate, hemp, indigo and cotton – were supplied. Universal consumption of these commodities made everyone who sugared their tea complicit in slavery. Figures vary, but the online Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database puts the number of men, women and children forcibly transported to the Americas and the Caribbean between 1525 and 1867 as an expendable labor force at 12-14 million. Nearly two-thirds were men. The rest comprised not only of women, but also children. Some estimate that in the entire history of the Atlantic slave trade one third of all the slaves taken from West Africa were transported by the Portuguese to their colonies,

especially Brazil.⁷⁵⁸ By comparison, only half a million were sent to the American South.⁷⁵⁹ One in eight was lost along the Middle Passage.⁷⁶⁰ Those lost were not just victims of the appalling conditions of transport. The enslaved did not endure any stage of their captivity peaceably; they fought, fled, and rose up in revolt at every opportunity. Slavery lasted in the United States well into an age when its absence could easily have been assumed and its presence should have been a universal outrage.

How do we account for the fact that English and American white citizenry only found the stirrings of their collective voice in opposition to this “holocaust”⁷⁶¹ in the late eighteenth century? And Initially, why was it that only trade in human beings that the Abolitionist movement objected to, and freeing those in bondage only came later as an issue?⁷⁶² There is no single explanation for the rise of Abolition in the British nation (fig. 86)**Error! Reference source not found.** One favored argument points to the emergence of Protestant Evangelicalism with its recommitment Christian universalism – to Christ’s teachings that all human beings are equal in God’s eyes. Another is the conviction of challenges to English law that did not uphold slavery. In *Moral Capital*, Christopher L. Brown offers a new theory in this debate. He relates the impact of the loss of the American Colonies on the state of the British Empire, eliciting a national debate over the moral considerations of slavery. After the revolution slavery was now an American problem that the British were able to disengage from and were free to condemn.⁷⁶³ But there are not any good answers, to justify why it took so long for slavery to register as an atrocity in the Atlantic world.

Historian Anthony Pagden offers interesting hindsight, which when applied to considering the delay in the emergence of an abolitionist movement illuminates the origins and the incipient flaws of the Atlantic Slave System. Profit and only profit drove this

enterprise, where greed invariably trumped morality. The explanation for slavery in the modern era he proposes is this:

The Europeans in America made the fatal mistake of handing their colonies over to those who regarded them only as places where they might secure for themselves goods and a way of life which they could never have hoped to acquire at home. They had compounded that mistake by trying to control such peoples by direct rule from a distant metropolis. Their most damaging error, however, had been to cultivate the crops from which the economic wealth of the colonies derived – primarily sugar – in lands where there was no available labour. Bringing vast numbers of human beings halfway across the globe was not merely unacceptably cruel...it was hugely wasteful, and had led to societies which, as the uprising of St. Domingue on 24 August 1791 had demonstrated, were bound, sooner or later to collapse in revolt. The British in Bengal had begun to cultivate sugar where there already existed and abundant labour force which could be paid, not enslaved.

But, as they say, hindsight is 20/20. From the perspective of the period, without the manual labor of African slaves, how would consumer demand have been met? It is a question worth asking when you consider historian David Eltis' controversial (to reviewers but not to me) thesis that without Africans, economic strategies would have been adopted other than slavery in the New World. Europeans could not, would not, have enslaved their own.⁷⁶⁴

Historian Edmund Morgan, provides this opinion on the social politics of bondage: "If Africans had been unavailable, it would probably have proved impossible to devise a way to keep a continuing supply of English immigrants in their place. There was a limit beyond which the abridgement of English liberties would have resulted not merely in rebellion but in protests from England and in the cutting off of the supply of further servants."⁷⁶⁵

Morgan further argues that in the 1650s – and for the next two hundred years after that – Virginians turned to slavery and a division along racial lines as an alternative to class conflict. **Error! Reference source not found.** "Racism made it possible for white Virginians to develop a devotion to the equality that English republicans had declared to be the soul of

liberty.” White men of all segments of society became politically much more equal when a present population of low-status black slaves (by comparison to whom) made it possible for whites to exalt their status. In the belief, “I may not be rich, but at least I am not a slave,” poor whites could console themselves, as indenture died out.⁷⁶⁶ This attitude has persisted in white America’s consciousness to this day in the sentiment, “I may be poor, but at least I am not black.”

Without the massive workforce slavery provided the capitalist system, where would the economy of the Western world be today? Would America be America? An America that was bought by the sweat and sacrifice of those denied the right to harvest her riches for themselves.

In British America (fig. 87 and fig. 88)**Error! Reference source not found.** under colonial rule, not only were people of African descent and Native Americans⁷⁶⁷ denied access to human rights protected by law, but this plunder and subjugation of blacks and Indians took place at the hands of white settlers without the intervention of the Crown and Parliament.⁷⁶⁸ As Morgan observes, “...Virginians could be confident that England would condone their slave laws, even though those laws were contrary to the laws of England.”⁷⁶⁹ Toni Morrison’s spare novel, *A Mercy*, unmask English opportunism practiced in the heart of this chilling, early modern borderland: “Cut loose from the earth’s soul, they insisted on purchase of its soil, and like all orphans they were insatiable. It was their destiny to chew up the world and spit out a horribleness that would destroy all primary peoples.”⁷⁷⁰

The English, more predisposed than their French and Spanish rivals of empire to “detect fundamental difference in color,” developed “an especially polarized conception of race” with devastating results and permanent consequence.⁷⁷¹ Winthrop D. Jordan in his

classic study of English and American racial attitudes, *White Over Black* (1968), contends that ideology predicated upon a hierarchy of racial difference furnished the English – who placed themselves squarely above all other men on the ladder of this Great Chain of Being – with a self-professed license to expropriate the land of indigenous Americans and the justification to exploit their newly acquired territory with mass enforced labor of enslaved Africans.⁷⁷² Thus, in the early history of the American intercultural encounter, a very high price was paid by a racialized some for the independence and freedom of racially privileged others.⁷⁷³

Until only too recently, American history was traditionally the story of its European colonizers. Emphasizing the “exceptional” accomplishments of European Americans, this narrative all but ignored whatever was morally reprehensible about their violence towards non-European peoples because these acts were committed in the name of progress and achievement, handily defined in decidedly Western teleological terms.⁷⁷⁴ The modern Civil Rights movement is a living memory still for many of us.

For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation. And yet out of bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. It the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail.

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963.

The struggle continues for all to be rightfully included in the American dream. It has taken nearly 250 years to come to the understanding that our rights belong to all people irrespective of their race, color, gender and now – the last bastion – sexual orientation: the civil rights issue of the 21st century.

We invoke the words of Jefferson and Lincoln because they say something about our legacy and our traditions. We do this because we

recognize our links to the past—at least when they flatter us. But black history does not flatter American democracy; it chastens it.

— Te Nehisi Coates. *Reparations The Atlantic*

It was common practice that African rulers engaged as agents in commerce with the Portuguese (and later with other European nations) as willing partners in the traffic in human beings.⁷⁷⁵ The partnership featured the Europeans slavers as the exporters of enslaved Africans brought to the coast for transport abroad by African suppliers.⁷⁷⁶ The rulers of Benin, the kings of Ashanti, of Kongo, Dahomey, and the Vili rulers of Loango, sold great numbers of slaves over many generations to the Europeans.⁷⁷⁷ The need for stable trade relations led to the establishment of a complex social network whereby African nobles occasionally were brought to court as part of “the Monarch’s diplomatic, commercial and religious projects.” These foreign guests were thought to lend prestige to the royal household.⁷⁷⁸ This – even as color-based prejudice and the demonization of blackness was hardening within European cultural consciousness.⁷⁷⁹

Unequivocally, without the participation of independent West African states the Atlantic slave trade would not have been possible. In the process a whole new “Afro-Euro-Atlantic society” emerged that was “totally dependent on markets and capitalism.”⁷⁸⁰ The commercial engagement between Europe and Africa in the traffic of human beings was pathological. Africans were the abductors of other Africans,⁷⁸¹ and the self-deluding European rationale for the slave trade was that their slave ships were merely stocked with captives in a “Just War”: a time worn concept that meant there was a legitimately recognized reason for war – the best one being self-defense – that authorized the taking of captives.⁷⁸² But the use of this theory in this case was a perversion of the doctrine. These were not so-called “just war” in which the Europeans had any part. Europeans were taking the human

booty of African wars off the hands of the African victors, yes, but these wars were mostly fought to feed the external slave trade in the first place.

How could Europeans have conquest rights over people they had never engaged and with whom they had no quarrel? A third-party exchange just did not count. Furthermore, the wars that yielded slaves were not “just wars” even among Africans. They were wars expressly fought to deny people their natural rights. There is no philosophy of justice in that.⁷⁸³

Inevitably, these practices resulted in a massive increase in violence that had a lasting impact on Africa. Certain African states, like Dahomey, established authority in the European Atlantic system expressly as slave raiding societies. The Dahomeyans built their wealth and power on commercial slave trading, period. No pretense to establishing a legitimate cause. Others, like the Asante, had a state structure that used the expediency of the export slave trade as not only a way to rid itself of enemies captured in war but also to remove undesirable civil elements who might challenge the authority of the state from within. They used enslavement as a strategy to clamp down on civil disobedience.⁷⁸⁴

In all instances, Europeans used a self-serving argument to justify the slave trade. They suggested that the Africans sent to the Americas would likely live their lives as slaves in Africa anyway, better that they should live as slaves in a Christian world.

John Thornton reasons in his influential work, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, that slavery was so pervasive in Africa as an indigenous social institution that internal forces were as critical as external forces in the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The spread of Islam into the Senegambia, further disseminated the particularly Muslim ethos of slavery found in the Sudan. In other parts of West Africa, Akan, Yoruba and Igbo slave owners modified the customs and traditions of their own cultures to resemble what

looked like a European tempered conception of slavery as practiced in the Americas.⁷⁸⁵ From 1600 into the twentieth century, hundreds of kingdoms, city-states, and ethnic kinship groups engaged in capturing, owning and trading slaves, both internally and externally.⁷⁸⁶ Hence, Thornton concludes, Africans were complicit in their own dissolution.⁷⁸⁷ Historian Joyce Chaplin notes, “how the paradoxical juxtaposition of slavery and freedom can be applied to Africa as well as America.”⁷⁸⁸

No doubt there was a mutuality of obligation and a necessary interdependence between African and European slave traders at the entrepôts along the West African coast. But Thornton overstates the case of African effect. Indigenous African slavery spread and changed its fundamental nature as a direct result of the international slave trade, beginning with the Islamic market.⁷⁸⁹ African slavery itself transformed from an autochthonous, subsidiary element in the social landscape – including forms of servitude and pawnship – into an ever-increasing centralized institution and system of oppression throughout African societies. This widespread phenomenon caused a European induced development of a class of privileged African slave-masters (slave merchants and slave *makers*) who depended on slaves for their economic and political power. The slave trade created class tensions within African societies as the local merchants and native rulers grew rich selling commoners to the European slavers.

...scenes of turbulence, upheavals, murders, betrayals, on foot, on land, and on the seas where horde upon horde of people were transported to places on the earth's surface that they had never heard of or even imagined, and murderer and murdered, betrayer and betrayed, the source of the turbulence, the instigator of the upheavals, were all mixed up, and the sorting out of the true, true truth and the rendering of judgments, or the acceptance of wrongs, and to accept that, to accept and lay still with being wronged will wear you down to nothing...

– Jamaica Kincaid, *See Now Then: A Novel*⁷⁹⁰

From the inception of commercial traffic between Prince Henry of Portugal and West Africa in the fifteenth century it was common practice that African rulers engaged as agents in commerce with the Portuguese (and later with other European nations) as willing partners: this partnership included the traffic in human beings.⁷⁹¹ The need for stable trade relations led to the establishment of a complex social network whereby African nobles occasionally were brought to court as part of what John Thornton calls “the Monarch’s diplomatic, commercial and religious projects.” These foreign guests were thought to lend prestige to the royal household.⁷⁹²

This, even as color-based prejudice and the demonization of blackness was hardening within European cultural consciousness as an extension of the incipient Atlantic slave trade.⁷⁹³

As trade expanded, it was common practice that into the care of foreign captains of merchant vessels monarchs and factors would place their own sons (and other young elites) for the purpose of transporting them to European capitols to be educated, acculturated in Western customs and manners, and baptized into the church. This was part of ensuring a network of alliances on both sides. It made for enlightened Christianized partners for the Europeans and brought stature and sophistication to the Africans’ ability to conduct business with the skills the Europeans required. European business associates standing in as Godparents for the young converts often secured such interpersonal allegiances. Since African political power was hereditary this enterprise of surrogacy was an investment that would reap benefits for generations to come.⁷⁹⁴ Sometimes this gesture of supreme trust – placing a child in the care of a foreign commercial partner – ended in betrayal for the Africans. Sometimes, for example, it was expedient for the Europeans to hold the young princes as hostages to ensure the cooperation of their fathers because there was no relying on force to secure

favorable trade relations. Sometimes these young African acolytes were treated cruelly – merely out of a blatant disregard for their humanity.⁷⁹⁵ This speaks to the inequality of Africans in European eyes even where race was mitigated by class.

How could Africans sell other Africans? For some it is unthinkable. For others, it is a relief to be able to share the burden of guilt. At the core is the profit motive, just as it was for Europeans and Euro-Americans. But it is important to understand this transaction in light of the cultural verities of African civilization. In *Black Odyssey*, Nathan Huggins offers this commentary:

The twentieth-century Western mind is frozen by the horror of men selling and buying others as slaves and even more stunned at the irony of black men serving as agents for the enslavement of blacks by whites. Shocking though it is, this human barter was truly the starkest representation of what modernism and Western capitalist expansion meant to traditional peoples.... The racial wrong was lost on African merchants, who saw themselves as selling people other than their own. The distinctions of tribe were more real to them than race, a concept yet to be refined by nineteenth and twentieth century rationalists.⁷⁹⁶

As for selling people “other than their own,” it is important to understand this in light of the cultural verities of slavery in West Africa. “The Atlantic slave trade and African participation had its solid origins in African societies and legal systems,” Thornton explains. “The institution of slavery was widespread in Africa and accepted in all the exporting regions, and the capture, purchase, transport, and sale of slaves was a regular feature of African society.” As a result of such a “preexisting social arrangement,” he avers, Africans were, indeed, as “much responsible as any external force for the development of the African slave trade.”⁷⁹⁷ True or not, for Huggins, such logic too often has served as an enabling convenience: “An early and continuing Euro-American rationale for slavery was that those Africans involved in the slave trade were “captives in just wars” who had been purchased by

traders from their captors.”⁷⁹⁸ From this pathological commercial engagement between Europe and West Africa was born a European and African co-dependent mutuality that pitted African elites against fellow Africans to the enduring benefit of the European slave traders, and European and European American slave owners.

The use of the term “tribe” has been contested since Huggins’ used it in 1977. “Tribe” as a social organizing principle is discredited because of its roots in Colonial administrative systems and flawed anthropological conceptions that invented a tribal past for Africa through the lens of the Eurocentric foreigner: the continent imagined as an extensive and cohesive sociopolitical confederation. We know now that ethnic and cultural distinctions were much more complex and diverse in African society than allowed for by the notion of tribe. Any way you parse the word, in no sense did Africans before European intervention self-identify as members of a “tribe.” In general usage, however, the word has staying power – even among peoples who were falsely classified. But Huggins’ argument that Africans did not possess a shared racial and cultural identity is even more relevant when viewed from an amended assessment of African social and political organization. That there is less unity than previously imagined among the peoples of Africa – that cultural units breakdown into to smaller groups than once thought and people saw themselves as distinct from others – only strengthens Huggins’ point.

In our amended understanding, we know that African society organizes around family allegiances, extended family allegiance, and fidelity to one’s village. Sometimes family ties extended further to the more tenuous bonds of a descent group or clan. Larger groups consisted of language affinities among the myriad tongues spoken. Larger political units were based on the collective allegiances of such localized units – with varying degrees of

robustness – to a state or an empire. The empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhay are the largest and best-known examples of African state formation. But smaller states than these include Jolof (Wolof), Kanem, Bornu, Benin, Lunda, Kongo and Ndongo, and a multitude of lesser states like the Hausa states of Northern Nigeria or the Akan states of modern central Ghana whose capitals were markets or trading posts: towns or larger towns. Inherent within this design of state formation was the potential for factionalism, even disunity. State control – be it a large state or a small state – depended on the ability of the military to hold outlying units together and exact tribute to support the administrative structures of centralized power. The smaller political units bound under a centralized authority had to acknowledge the benefit of this allegiance or fear retribution in order to pay the tribute assessed. In general, in Atlantic Africa it was difficult to forge any greater unity across the restricting definitions of the language groups that defined political boundaries.⁷⁹⁹

Consequences

It was on the slave ship that Africans became “raced.” Men, women and children from all over the landscape of West Africa, who spoke different languages, who were distinct in kinship, whose cultural practices were different from the next, were thrown together as one by their oppressors. It was their skin color that would now define them, homogenize them, in their shared condition of bondage. No longer Yoruba, Igbo, Asante, they were classified by their oppressors simply as Negroes – as Blacks. The diverse collection of Europeans who subjugated the Africans also shared only one thing in common – not language, not culture, not state affiliation – but skin color – they were all white. And white *men* at that. It is from our misunderstanding of this verity of slavery that we assume in hindsight the unity of Africans in

their blackness during their lives in Africa. The consciousness of their color as a signifier only came with their forced removal from home. In his innovative book *Slave Ship*, Marcus Rediker contends that the rich black culture of the African Diaspora began in the Middle Passage, forged out of the unifying experience of slavery itself. And although black was an externally imposed label on people from Africa, “blackness” was black inflected with their agency.⁸⁰⁰ All Africans in America invariably went through a process of re-identification, moving from ethnicity to race.⁸⁰¹

The violent upheaval and dislocation of so many people to supply forced labor for the American and Caribbean markets had a devastating and indelible effect on African social development. Walter Rodney is the scholar who since 1972 has been associated with the now contested thesis that the trans-Atlantic slave trade caused Africa’s underdevelopment. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney takes the view that Europe deliberately exploited and underdeveloped Africa in the interests of Capitalism. He argues that because the four-hundred-year “European Slave Trade” was a history of transactions predicated on “warfare, trickery, banditry, and kidnaping” – pitting the peoples of Africa as discrete ethnic groups against each other – it was not really a trade in the traditional sense at all. As a result, the market for captives should be measured for its effect as “social violence” and not as commerce.

Rodney further contends that the loss of a massive indigenous labor force to the outside world is a level of economic destruction from which Africa has never recovered.⁸⁰² He also claims that indigenous slavery in Africa was very marginal and that it only expanded under European influence. Rodney’s latter position is in direct opposition to John Thornton’s view that indigenous African slavery was not a consequence of external demand. According

to Thornton not only was slavery an indigenous African social institution, it was vital to political hierarchies that created a ruling elite with hegemony over a poorer population was likely to be enslaved at some juncture. And during the course of the slave trade with Europe those in power protected their ranks from the demographic impacts and social dislocations that Rodney emphasizes, which was sufficient to insure social stability. Thornton also asserts that the return in goods that Africa received for its loss of human capital was “not economically essential to African well-being or development.” This is because the Atlantic trade primarily brought luxury goods to Africa that did not even displace the local industry in luxury items. Furthermore, contrary to most scholars’ view, Thornton argues that trade with Europe brought nothing to Africa that it did not already have. Furthermore, Africans also played a greater in developing commerce, and with more agency than most scholars give them credit for, says Thornton.⁸⁰³ So, the bottom line is that Africa traded human beings for a life of depredation in bondage, receiving nothing it actually needed: Even if a certain degree of free will was exercised by the ruling class in this exchange, how impossibly tragic.

Paul Lovejoy, one of the world’s preeminent experts in African slavery writes: “I have not been interested in demonstrating that the trans-Atlantic slave trade caused African underdevelopment, although I think that the evidence demonstrates a causal relationship.” He offers a position somewhat between Rodney and Thornton, a “transformation thesis” that sees Africa as altered in an incalculably harmful way by first the Islamic and then the trans-Atlantic slave trades, which reinforced class hierarchy, internecine warfare, and a dependence on foreign commerce to the detriment of natural internal development and native productivity. For me Patrick Manning sums it up best: “slavery was a sacrifice of Africans for the transformation of the wider world, and slavery was a tragedy for the people of Africa.”

However, there is no denying that indigenous slavery was present and viable before European intervention.

Thornton makes the case that there is a general misunderstanding of a significant difference between European and African economies – how the acquisition of individual wealth was calculated – that makes it impossible to discount the importance of slavery as a social institution of Atlantic Africa:

Slavery was widespread in Atlantic Africa because slaves were the only form of private, revenue-producing property recognized in African law. By contrast, in European legal systems, land was the primary form of private, revenue-producing property, and slavery was relatively minor... Thus, it was the absence of landed private property – or, to be more precise, it was the corporate ownership of land – that made slavery so pervasive as an aspect of African society.

Michael A. Gomez recounts in *Exchanging Our Country Marks* how there were great tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Sierra Leone Mande speaking people, the “Mandingoes,” who were “Mohamedans,” were “as zealous promoters of their religion as even Mohamed himself could wish”. And even though their numbers were among the smallest, “[f]rom the middle of the sixteenth century through the seventeenth century, the region’s principal sources for the slave trade was littoral, non-Muslim populations.”⁸⁰⁴ One can but speculate that the non-Muslim population had succumbed to the domination of their Islamic neighbors, who captured and sold them. They were all black Africans but color was not an important signifier, religious and ethnic differences were. “These wars do not appear to have been waged for territorial expansion.” It would appear that “slaves were used in the domestic economy to increase the ruler’s personal income, and perhaps this in itself can explain the propensity for wars that did not increase wealth by the annexation of territory but by the annexation and transport of

people.” All because in West Africa slaves were the most significant representation of personal wealth, and were the only recognized form of private property. Sometimes the slaves of war were sold, and sometimes they were put to work by the victors in their “home territory.”⁸⁰⁵

In Europe land use is so tied to wealth production it is a conceptual disconnect for early modern Europeans to associate goods produced with the worker who provided the labor to create them. *Las Siete Partidas*, the Castilian law code introduced by Alfonso X so long ago, establishes ownership of land as a fundamental tenet, if land is not owned by a private person, it should be owned by the state. To Europeans it was simply unthinkable that land was not somebody’s private property. This is the ideology behind the concept of *terra nullius* that so disadvantaged the Africans with their corporate property practices. The European institution of kingship itself was predicated on families of landed, military nobility.⁸⁰⁶ “Africans owned *products* of the land not the land itself.” For Africans wealth came in the transfer of ownership of people.⁸⁰⁷ Thornton urges us to understand from our informed perspective that owning slaves was the only way to accumulate private wealth in African societies: to recognize this as a legal divergence and not judge the African social system as backward or un-egalitarian. And that enslaved Africans lived under conditions more akin to free tenants or works for hire in Europe and did not constitute an unproductive disaffected labor force, as African slaves transported to the New World or slaves in Europe. Some even gaining the status of soldiers, administrators or royal advisers.⁸⁰⁸

The European social architects of the Atlantic System of slavery⁸⁰⁹ used racialized cultural hierarchies as justification for placing Africans in bondage. Blackness was an essentialist identification that inhered not to the individual but to all who possessed that

somatic trait. Africans were assigned behavioral characteristic based on their black skin as common phenotype. This behavior was then attributed to cultural difference. Early modern Europeans associated Blackness with incivility and bestiality. In this transmogrification, we have the origins of the social construction of a false teleology of racial superiority – a gradation of otherness –that existed only to rationalize discrimination against non–Europeans by Europeans.⁸¹⁰ It is the ideology that tolerates a free person losing control over his or her life. It justifies treating human beings as chattel. To be commoditized as property is to deny a person their humanity; it equals, in the words of sociologist Orlando Patterson, “social death.”⁸¹¹

How does one live in a post–enslavement culture? Say, a culture such as the United States a with 400 year old legacy of slavery and barely a generation of (quasi) protected civil right? Can anyone possibly imagine that their lives, their identities, their economic position, or their subjective selves are free and clear of this long history? Can even those of us who came here well past slavery’s demise imagine that we are not affected by the patterns of interaction and systems of beliefs persist from that era?

In post slavery culture, whiteness remains the measure of a man, that is, of humanity.

– Linda Martin Alcoff, Foreword to *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, George Yancy (2008)⁸¹²

NOTES

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³⁸⁶ William D. Jr. Phillips, “The Old World Background of Slavery in the Americas,” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (Cambridge; New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press ; W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research, Harvard University, 1991).

³⁸⁷ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 22; Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Culture Consequence 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), xiii.

³⁸⁸ Philip D. Curtin, *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

³⁸⁹ J. H Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (Penguin Books, 2003), 125.

³⁹⁰ Alfred W. Crosby, “Conquistadors y Pestilencia,” in *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Culture Consequence 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 35.

³⁹¹ Crosby, “Conquistadors y Pestilencia.”

³⁹² Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3300155>.

³⁹³ Bruce M. Rothschild, “Review - History of Syphilis,” *Clinical Infectious Diseases: An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America*. 40, no. 10 (2005): 1454–63.

³⁹⁴ John J. Ross, “Shakespeare’s Chancre: Did the Bard Have Syphilis?,” *Clinical Infectious Diseases: An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America* 40, no. 3 (2005): 399–404. Dr. Ross published his hypothesis for the public in 2012 in John J. Ross, *Shakespeare’s Tremor and Orwell’s Cough: The Medical Lives of Great Writers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2012), 40–3; 399–404; See Alfred W. Crosby, “The Early History of Syphilis: A Reappraisal,” in *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Culture Consequence 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); See also Johannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare’s England* (London; Bristol, Pa.: Jessica Kingsley, 1994) – making a circumstantial case mostly from clues in the sonnets and a tremulous signature on his will (mercury induced palsy?).

³⁹⁵ Jason M. Yaremko, “‘Gente Bárbara:’ Indigenous Rebellion, Resistance and Persistence in Colonial Cuba, c. 1500–1800,” *Kacike: The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (December 2006): 157–184.

³⁹⁶ About the English encounter with indigenous peoples in North America see Chaplin, *Subject Matter*; On *encomiendas* see William D. Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 44; Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, 2005. See also Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 135–7. “The particular skills that African slaves possessed favored African as opposed to Native American slavery. In the early days of the conquests, Native Americans, who owned no large domestic animals, would be unsuitable for raising cattle or riding horses, although obviously, in time many Native Americans learned to deal with these animals, eventually becoming feared as a cavalry. But in early times such tasks might fall to African slaves.” 135. “By ensuring that slaves were acquired only from outside, the Crown could control, rent, and tax the trade, which would have been more difficult for local trade.” 136. ... “[I]t was not slavery or the slave trade that the Spanish Crown opposed, but rather slave raiding and trading among Native Americans. The Crown not only wished to limit use of Native Americans as slaves but to end the Native American slave trade.” 136. The same was true of the Portuguese in Brazil. See also, Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 21–24.

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- ³⁹⁷ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 26.
- ³⁹⁸ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ³⁹⁹ Curtin, *The World and the West*, 6–7.
- ⁴⁰⁰ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 30–31; 34.
- ⁴⁰¹ John W. Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560.*, vol. 1 (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 20.
- ⁴⁰² Quinine and tonic.
- ⁴⁰³ Population and territorial numbers. Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, “Spain, Circa 1492: Social Values and Structures,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge [u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 109.
- ⁴⁰⁴ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History: With a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 40; Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 13.
- ⁴⁰⁵ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 7;36–38.
- ⁴⁰⁶ Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 55.
- ⁴⁰⁷ Curtin, *The World and the West*, xiv;1;4; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 19.
- ⁴⁰⁸ Ivana Elbl, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521,” *Journal of World History* 3, no. 2 (1992): 165–204.
- ⁴⁰⁹ John W. Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 21;46.
- ⁴¹⁰ John W. Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 44–45;47.
- ⁴¹¹ M. D. D. Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670: A Documentary History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13; Kwesi James Anquandah, *Castles & Forts of Ghana* (Atalante: Ghana Museums & Monuments Board, 1999).

⁴¹² Donald W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Atlantic America, 1492-1800. Vol. 1* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 21.

⁴¹³ Phillips, “The Old World Background of Slavery in the Americas,” 49.

⁴¹⁴ “Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640),” *African Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (September 1974): 412–413, doi:10.2307/523641.

⁴¹⁵ Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36.

⁴¹⁶ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 38.

⁴¹⁷ M. D. D. Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 51; A. J. R. Russell-Wood, “Preface to the Johns Hopkins Edition,” in *The Portuguese Empire, 1415-1808: A World on the Move* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), xiii.

⁴¹⁸ Rebecca Catz, *Christopher Columbus and the Portuguese, 1476-1498* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 167; Russell-Wood, “Preface to the Johns Hopkins Edition,” xiii.

⁴¹⁹ William J. Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 164–165.

⁴²⁰ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 7.

⁴²¹ Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, “Better to Be Lucky Than Smart,” in *The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2013), 49–51; Thomas Penn, *Winter King: Henry VII and the Dawn of Tudor England* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 32; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco Da Gama* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴²² The Treaty of Tordesillas (Portuguese: Tratado de Tordesilhas, Spanish: Tratado de Tordesillas), signed at Tordesillas (now in Valladolid province, Spain), 7 June 1494, divided the “newly discovered” lands outside Europe between Spain and Portugal along a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands (off the west coast of Africa). This line of demarcation was about halfway between the Cape Verde Islands (already Portuguese) and the islands “discovered” by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage (claimed for Spain), named in the treaty as Cipangu and Antilia (Cuba and Hispaniola). The lands to the east would belong to Portugal and the lands to the west to Spain.

⁴²³ Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 174.

⁴²⁴ For analysis of the Treaty of Tordesillas see Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 63.

⁴²⁵ David Hume first to identify this advent as such, as quoted in Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 2.

⁴²⁶ José de Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Clements R. Markham, trans. Edward Grimston (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 90, as quoted in Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*.

⁴²⁷ Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 78.

⁴²⁸ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 3.

⁴²⁹ I liked this image of the Pillars so much, I borrowed it for myself. Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 11;13.

⁴³⁰ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 4.

⁴³¹ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*.

⁴³² Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, Foreword, J. R. McNeill, xiv–xv.

⁴³³ Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400–1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99; Ringrose, *Expansion and Global Interaction, 1200-1700*, 87–88.

⁴³⁴ Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 1.

⁴³⁵ “From antiquity to the early fifteenth century the Atlantic was known as the Ocean Sea, that band of water that encompassed and enclosed the inhabitable world, the *oikoumene* of Herodotus’s *History*.” Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

⁴³⁶ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, “Portuguese Expansion in a Global Context,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 495.

⁴³⁷ Joyce Chaplin says that “by not paying attention to theory and cultural studies early Americanists may miss opportunities to translate key events and trends in their field into terms that can give impact outside it. Theories can bridge fields – they are trading languages that can operate across frontiers.” Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 1433.

⁴³⁸ Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco Da Gama*, 46.

⁴³⁹ Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, 7.

⁴⁴⁰ Edward Sampson, *Celebrating The Other: A Dialogic Account Of Human Nature* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1993).

⁴⁴¹ The Tempest, Act 2, Scene I.

⁴⁴² Douglas R. Egerton, *The Atlantic World: A History, 1400-1888* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2007), 1.

⁴⁴³ Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 1432.

⁴⁴⁴ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 1.

⁴⁴⁵ The publication of the first volume of his masterwork Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1949).

⁴⁴⁶ Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 1449.

⁴⁴⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Nachdr. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 1.

⁴⁴⁸ See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean*, 1:19; Alison Games, “AHR Forum: Oceans of History - Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *The American Historical Review*. 111, no. 3 (2006): 741–767; Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 111; J. E. Chaplin, “Expansion and Exceptionalism in Early American History,” *Journal of American History* 89 (2003): 1431–55.

⁴⁴⁹ Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, 2.

⁴⁵⁰ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge [u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 250.

⁴⁵¹ Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., “Preface,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge [u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), xiii.

⁴⁵² Stuart B. Schwartz, “Introduction,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge [u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 1–2.

⁴⁵³ Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178.

⁴⁵⁴ See Schwartz, “Introduction,” 2. “It was Greg Denning in his study of the Marquesas Islands who employed the powerful metaphor of islands and beaches as a way of understanding cultural encounters, so that culture forms an island that must be approached across a beach separating it from all others.” Says the eminent historian Greg Denning in his celebrated study of the Marquesas Islands wherein he coins islands and beaches as a potent metaphor for understanding cultural encounters. Just as an island must be accessed from a beach that safeguards its isolation, so too human beings model their cultures with boundaries that they construct between them. Denning, *Beach Crossings*. Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989).

⁴⁵⁵ “Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference.” Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 13.

⁴⁵⁶ Cadamosto, *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. G. R. Crone (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937); S. E. Morison and G. R. Crone, “Review of The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (January 1939): 337–33, doi:10.2307/1839035; Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116: “It is the star to every wandering bark ...”

⁴⁵⁷ Isaac Asimov, *How Did We Find Out the Earth Is Round?* (London: White Lion Publishers, 1976).

⁴⁵⁸ “When the Portuguese mariners got below the equator, the North Star was no longer in the heavens, which meant that they had to develop new celestial navigation with the Southern Cross, the constellation visible in the Southern Hemisphere almost any time of the year.” Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 7.

⁴⁵⁹ Greg Denning, *Performances* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.

⁴⁶⁰ Denning, *Performances*, 41–42; 44.

⁴⁶¹ Dening, *Performances*, 30.

⁴⁶² Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 53, no. 2 (1996): 3–5.

⁴⁶³ Nicholas Kristof, "Opinion | Africa on the Rise," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/opinion/sunday/africa-on-the-rise.html>.

⁴⁶⁴ See Preface in Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*: "Pursuing insights that I gained from Walter Rodney (1966, 1967, 1968), I have focused on the impact of the slave trade on change in Africa, fully recognizing that transformations always occur in context, which is inevitably local. Hence, I have not been interested in demonstrating that the trans-Atlantic slave trade caused African underdevelopment, although I think that the evidence demonstrates a causal relationship. Rather, I have wanted to explore the ways in which the demand for slaves in the Americas and elsewhere affected the political economy of the areas from where the slaves came, and in so doing to demonstrate the interaction between local and global forces. Critics, however, have sought to demonstrate that internal economic, political and social factors were so overwhelmingly dominant or otherwise impervious to external influence that there were no transformations within Africa that resulted from the slave trade. For Eltis, economic indicators are used to demonstrate the economic marginality of the slave trade on African economies (Eltis, 1987). For Inikori, slavery did not exist in Africa during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and transformation that occurred took place in the Americas in a racialized context (Inikori, 1996). Thornton, on the other hand, argues that slavery was so pervasive in Africa that the Americas could be settled by slaves only because of their prior availability (Thornton, 1998). For Thornton the extent of transformation has been overstated." See also, Djibril Tamsir Niane et al., "The Decline of the Empire of Mali: The Fifteenth to Sixteenth Centuries," in *Africa From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford; Berkeley: J. Currey ; University of California Press, 1997).

⁴⁶⁵ Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002).

⁴⁶⁶ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*.

⁴⁶⁷ Ricardo Pelizzo, "Timbuktu: A Lesson in Underdevelopment," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 7, no. 2 (2015): 265–83.

⁴⁶⁸ About Portuguese salt making and trading see Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 52;54.

⁴⁶⁹ Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668* (London [u.a.: Routledge, 2009), 2.

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- ⁴⁷⁰ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 91.
- ⁴⁷¹ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 2002, 231.
- ⁴⁷² Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 17–19.
- ⁴⁷³ Nehemia Levtzion, ed., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Press, 2010), 94; Andreas Massing, “The Wangara, an Old Soninke Diaspora in West Africa?,” *Cahiers d’études Africaines Cahiers d’études Africaines* 40 (2000): 281–308.
- ⁴⁷⁴ Edward W. Bovill, “The Silent Trade of Wangara,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 29, no. 113 (1929): 27–38.
- ⁴⁷⁵ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 309.
- ⁴⁷⁶ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 118; Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 309.
- ⁴⁷⁷ William H. Worger, Nancy L. Clark, and Edward A. Alpers, *Africa and the West: A Documentary History, Vol. 1: From the Slave Trade to Conquest, 1441-1905*, 2 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.
- ⁴⁷⁸ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 120.
- ⁴⁷⁹ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*.
- ⁴⁸⁰ Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa* (New York: H. Holt, 1994), xvii. Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9. See also Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 61.
- ⁴⁸¹ Levtzion, *The History of Islam in Africa*, 3;5.
- ⁴⁸² Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *1492: The Year the World Began* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 66.
- ⁴⁸³ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*.
- ⁴⁸⁴ Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *The Royal Kingdoms*, 45.

⁴⁸⁵ F. J. Nöthling, *Pre-Colonial Africa Her Civilisations and Foreign Contacts* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1989), 16–17, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/23111380.html>.

⁴⁸⁶ Dening, *Performances*, 34.

⁴⁸⁷ Michael de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 209–243.

⁴⁸⁸ Djeli Mamadou's version was translated into French and published as *Soundjata ou Epoque Mandiginue* in 1960, by one of West Africa's foremost historians, D. T. Niane. As quoted in Basil Davidson, Djeli Mamadou Kouyate, Djibril Tamsir Niane, David W. Chappell, and Jim Jones, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2009), 90.

⁴⁸⁹ MacGaffey, "Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa," 251.

⁴⁹⁰ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, "Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Orature," *Performance Research* 12, no. 3 (November 30, 2007): 4–7, doi:10.1080/13528160701771253.

⁴⁹¹ Henry Louis Gates and William L. Andrews, eds., *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772–1815* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas, 1998), 4.

⁴⁹² Lydia Polgreen, "Saving Timbuktu's Priceless Artifacts From Militants' Clutches," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2013, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/04/world/africa/saving-timbuktus-priceless-artifacts-from-militants-clutches.html>.

⁴⁹³ David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009), 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Bovill, "The Silent Trade of Wangara."

⁴⁹⁵ From the observation of Leo Africannus in Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 148.

⁴⁹⁶ For this account of Mansa Musa AND the caravan trade see Edward W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors – West African Kingdoms in the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 1995), 85–91 and Cadamosto, *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, xi–xvii.

⁴⁹⁷ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 103.

⁴⁹⁸ See Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 30–34; Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 328;355–357; 359, 385; McKissack & McKissack, *The Royal Kingdoms*, 84–106; 111–114.

⁴⁹⁹ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 385–386.

⁵⁰⁰ Pelizzo, “Timbuktu,” 265–283.

⁵⁰¹ Adam Nossiter, “In Timbuktu, Mali Rebels and Islamists Impose Harsh Rule,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2012, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/world/africa/in-timbuktu-mali-rebels-and-islamists-impose-harsh-rule.html>.

⁵⁰² Adam Nossiter, “Islamists in North Mali Stone Couple to Death,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 2012, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/31/world/africa/couple-stoned-to-death-by-islamists-in-mali.html>.

⁵⁰³ W.L. Rathje, “Why the Taliban Are Destroying Buddhas,” *USA Today*, March 22, 2001, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/science/archaeology/2001-03-22-afghan-buddhas.htm>.

⁵⁰⁴ Polgreen, “Saving Timbuktu’s Priceless Artifacts From Militants’ Clutches.”

⁵⁰⁵ Holland Cotter, “African Art Is Under Threat in Djenne-Djenno,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2012, sec. Art & Design, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/arts/design/african-art-is-under-threat-in-djenne-djenno.html>.

⁵⁰⁶ Ivana Elbl, “The State of Research: Henry ‘the Navigator,’” *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001): 79. See also, Russel, “Henry was claimed by the geographer Samuel Purchase to have been the first person to demonstrate the English genius for maritime exploration.” Giving his Plantagenet mother a lot of credit. Peter Edward Russell, *Prince Henry “the Navigator:” A Life* (New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2001), 1; R.H. Major labeled him ‘The Navigator’ in his 1868 biography, and it has stuck. Major based his account on an uncritical reading of Zurara. Richard Henry Major, *The Life of Prince Henry of Portugal, Surnamed the Navigator; ...* (London, etc.: A. Asher, etc., 1868).

⁵⁰⁷ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 46.

⁵⁰⁸ Cadamosto, *The Voyages*, 28.

⁵⁰⁹ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 301.

⁵¹⁰ Their common ancestor is Abu Bakr b. Umar. Levtzion, *The History of Islam in Africa*, 78.

⁵¹¹ MacGaffey, “Europeans on the Atlantic coast of Africa,” 259.

⁵¹² Cadamosto, *Voyages*, 36, 38.

⁵¹³ Denning, *Performances*, xiv.

⁵¹⁴ Denning, *Performances*, 205.

⁵¹⁵ Act 3, Scene 2, Page 3, *As You Like It*.

⁵¹⁶ Since 1448 according to Cadamosto, the Portuguese had conducted trade with two Senegalese Wolof kingdoms, Walo and Kayor, and had already sailed up the Senegal River. The trade took place on an unidentified anchorage of the Kayor kingdom known in Portuguese as “As Palmas de Budomel,” located somewhere between the mouth of the Senegal River. Cadamosto, *Voyages*. For markets and Cadamosto as a curiosity for his “whiteness” and clothes, and curiosity of elephants see “Kingdom of Senega,” 42–49. Elephant gifts for Prince Henry, 73. See also, Peter Russell, *Prince Henry*, 312.

⁵¹⁷ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 8.

⁵¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2012).

⁵¹⁹ Luís de Moura Sobral, “The Expansion and the Arts: Transfers, Contaminations, Innovations,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 391.

⁵²⁰ Peter Russell, *Prince Henry*, 312.

⁵²¹ Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 6.

⁵²² Mary H. Helms, “Essay on Objects Interpretation of Distance Made Tangible,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge [u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 356; 359; 375..

⁵²³ William Buller Fagg, Bedřich Forman, and Werner Forman, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories* (London: Batchworth Press, 1959); Sobral, “The Expansion of the Arts,” 397–404.

⁵²⁴ Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 38.

⁵²⁵ Pablo Picasso, “Discovery of African Art, (1906–1907),” 33–34; Gertrude Stein, “Matisse and Picasso and African Art, (1906–1907),” 35–36, in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, ed. Jack D. Flam and Miriam Deutch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵²⁶ Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art, 19th & 20th Centuries* (New York: G. Braziller, 1982), 193.

⁵²⁷ “Inchoate and primordial,” in Helms, “Essay on Objects: Interpretation of Distance,” 356; 359; 375; 377. See Rubin, McEvilley, Clifford on this debate in articles reprinted in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, edited by Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch.

⁵²⁸ Cotter, “African Art Is Under Threat in Djenne-Djenno.”

⁵²⁹ Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670*, 4.

⁵³⁰ For an examination of the tension of Henry’s place between historical traditions of interpretation see Elbl, *The State of Research*.

⁵³¹ Ringrose, *Expansion*, 37.

⁵³² Ringrose, *Expansion*, 31.

⁵³³ As quoted in part in Pankaj Mishra, “Watch this Man,” 10–12; See also Ann Coulter, “This Is War,” *Townhall.Com*, September 14, 2001, <https://townhall.com/columnists/anncoulter/2001/09/14/this-is-war-n865496>.

⁵³⁴ Ron Suskind, “Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 2004, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html>.

⁵³⁵ Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco Da Gama*, 25.

⁵³⁶ A. J. R. Russell-Wood, “Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes, 1440–1770,” *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (February 1, 1978): 17, doi:10.1086/ahr/83.1.16; Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*: 8.

⁵³⁷ Malyn Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 31.

⁵³⁸ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 22.

⁵³⁹ Sá, “Ecclesiastical Structures and Religious Action,” 255.

⁵⁴⁰ Raphael Minder, “Mosque-Cathedral of Spain at Center of Debate Over Its Religious History,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 2014, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/10/world/europe/mosque-cathedral-of-cordoba-spain-at-center-of-debate-over-religious-history.html>.

⁵⁴¹ James Reston, *Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition, and the Defeat of the Moors* (London: Faber, 2007); See also www.alhambradegranada.org.

⁵⁴² Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 86.

⁵⁴³ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 55; see also Aristotle and Kennedy, *On Rhetoric*.

⁵⁴⁴ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 249; 254.

⁵⁴⁵ Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716*.

⁵⁴⁶ Ringrose, *Expansion*, 40.

⁵⁴⁷ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 52.

⁵⁴⁸ Thomas J. Abercrombie, “When the Moors Ruled Spain,” *National Geographic*, July 1988.

⁵⁴⁹ Abercrombie, “When the Moors Ruled Spain.”

⁵⁵⁰ Ringrose, *Expansion*, 31.

⁵⁵¹ Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 63–64.

⁵⁵² Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, 1:86–87.

⁵⁵³ Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa*, 2–3.

⁵⁵⁴ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 23.

⁵⁵⁵ Reston, *Dogs of God*, xvii.

⁵⁵⁶ G. R. Crone, "Introduction," in *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, by Cadamosto (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937), xi.

⁵⁵⁷ Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668*, 6.

⁵⁵⁸ Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 160; Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 102; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 35. Thornton is a contrarian of the positions I have advanced. He favors a less "romantic" view: "European navigation in the South Atlantic was not the product of long-range visionary schemes, an explosion of pent-up commercial energy, or even the response to new technology. Instead it was the cautious advance of a new frontier, using or slightly modifying existing technology and relying on relatively small amounts of private capital." On the map Mansa Musa is spelled "Musse Melly." Crone, "Introduction," xii; xvii; xvii–xxi.

⁵⁵⁹ Reston, *Dogs of God*, 13–14; Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 51; Sá, "Ecclesiastical Structures and Religious Action," 257–258; Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 23.

⁵⁶⁰ Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 50; Gomes Eannes de Zurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, trans. C. Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage (New York, N.Y.: Burt Franklin, 1896), chap. 7;9.

⁵⁶¹ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 97.

⁵⁶² Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco Da Gama*, 45.

⁵⁶³ Lowe, "'Representing' Africa," 106.

⁵⁶⁴ Lowe, "'Representing' Africa," 115.

⁵⁶⁵ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 20; Lowe, "'Representing' Africa," 108.

⁵⁶⁶ As quoted in Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 25.

⁵⁶⁷ Some considered Prester John the progeny of King Caspar. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, 114.

⁵⁶⁸ "The Prester John myth had important implications for Ethiopian ambassadors in terms of terminology, for they were consistently described in documents and texts as *indiani* or Indians, even though they were known to come from Ethiopia. Ethiopians in Italy in the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries referred to themselves as *Abissini* or Abyssinians and (of course) never as *indiani*. Perversely, following Greek usage, throughout the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance the Italian and Latin words for Ethiopia and Ethiopians were used as generic terms for sub-Saharan Africa rather than a specific term (and this Latin usage also occurred on occasion in Portugal, so the Congolese in Lisbon are sometimes referred to as Ethiopians.” Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 118–119.

⁵⁶⁹ As quoted in Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 102–103.

⁵⁷⁰ Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 105–106.

⁵⁷¹ It was customary for African ambassadors, Princes and Kings to dress in European finery, especially if they were to be baptized. Lowe, “‘Representing’ Africa,” 112.

⁵⁷² Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 25.

⁵⁷³ Ringrose, *Expansion*, 17–18; Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 18.

⁵⁷⁴ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 27; Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*.

⁵⁷⁵ “The name Guinea is usually said to have been a corrupt form of the name Ghana, picked up by the Portuguese in the Maghrib.” However, Bovill points out, “The name Guinea has been in use both in the Maghrib and in Europe long before Prince Henry’s time... The modern application of the name Guinea to the coast dates only from 1481,” the year in which the Portuguese built the fort São Jorge da Mina (Elmina), and the Portuguese monarch acquired the title Lord of Guinea, in Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 116. Guinea “derives from the name Gunowa, written Gunee by the Portuguese, which was the native name of the nearest Negro kingdom with which the Portuguese ... first made contact on the Atlantic coasts of Africa. The name was applied to the African coasts from the Gambia to the Benguela in Portuguese Angola,” in M. D. W. Jeffreys, “Guinea: Pointers to the Origin of This Word,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 12, no. 48 (1972): 666–69, doi:10.2307/4391177.

⁵⁷⁶ The Lusitanians (or *Lusitani* in Latin) is the name rendered by the Romans for the Indo-European tribesmen living in the Western Iberian Peninsula, i.e. Portugal. Lusitania is used as a metaphor for the Portuguese people, and similarly, Lusophone is used to refer to a Portuguese speaker.

⁵⁷⁷ A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27; Blake, *Europeans in West African –1450–1560*, 5;14.

⁵⁷⁸ C.R Decorse, “Culture Contact, Continuity, and Change on the Gold Coast, AD 1400-1900,” *The African Archaeological Review* 10 (1992): 163–96. See also, “Gold was

obtained from the natives in the form of gold dust washed up by the streams and of gold bangles and bracelets, on ship loading a complete cargo of the latter,” in James E. Gillespie, review of *European Beginnings in West Africa, 1454-1578: A Survey of the First Century of White Enterprise in West Africa, with Special Emphasis Upon the Rivalry of the Great Powers*, by John W. Blake, *The American Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (January 1939): 339, doi:10.2307/1839036.

⁵⁷⁹ Newitt, *A History of the Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 23;26.

⁵⁸⁰ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 6–7.

⁵⁸¹ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 81.

⁵⁸² Russell, *Prince Henry*, 6–7.

⁵⁸³ Crone, “Introduction,” 4; Newitt, *A History of the Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 30.

⁵⁸⁴ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, 121.

⁵⁸⁵ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 19.

⁵⁸⁶ A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire, 1415-1808: A World on the Move* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 2.

⁵⁸⁷ The National Museum of Ancient Art houses the country's greatest collection Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga the polyptych of St. Vincent by Nuno Gonçalves, c.1470 the polyptych from St. Vincent's monastery attributed to Nuno Gonçalves between 1460 and 1470. The Saint Vincent Panels, or The 'Adoration of Saint Vincent' panels, are a polyptych consisting of six panels they also agree that the children of king John I are represented on these panels, but they don't agree who is whom One of the more controversial issues is the depiction of Prince Henry the Navigator. The man in black in the third panel is immediately consonant with popular conceptions of Prince Henry's likeness – a man with a light moustache and distinctive black round chaperon was a form of hood or, later, highly versatile hat worn in all parts of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Initially a utilitarian garment, it first grew a long partly decorative tail behind, – which can be found in numerous pictures and statues of Prince Henry today. However, there are strong reasons to doubt that this is him. There are 60 portraits of leading figures of Portuguese history. Russell, *Prince Henry*, 4.

⁵⁸⁸ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 80–81.

⁵⁸⁹ Jonathan Locke Hart, *Columbus, Shakespeare, and the Interpretation of the New World*, 1st ed (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

⁵⁹⁰ For a full discourse on the myth of the School of Navigators, see Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, Chapter 7.

⁵⁹¹ Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 65 –66.

⁵⁹² See MacBeth.

⁵⁹³ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 81–82.

⁵⁹⁴ Here I borrow Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s argument and employ the strategy he applies to his investigation of the life of Henry the Navigator’s contemporary, another legendary figure in the Portuguese saga of expansion, Vasco Da Gama, in *The Career and Legend of Vasco Da Gama*, 23.

⁵⁹⁵ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 82, 85.

⁵⁹⁶ Elbl, *The State of Research*, 87.

⁵⁹⁷ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, xv.

⁵⁹⁸ J. H. Plumb, “Introduction,” in *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, by Charles Ralph Boxer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), xxi; xxvi.

⁵⁹⁹ Fernández-Armesto, “Portuguese Expansion in a Global Context,” 508.

⁶⁰⁰ Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415–1670*, 2.

⁶⁰¹ Diogo Ramada Curto, “Portuguese Imperial and Colonial Culture,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 319.

⁶⁰² Quesada, “Spain, Circa 1492: Social Values and Structures,” 7.

⁶⁰³ Catia Antunes, “Antunes on Curto and Bethencourt, ‘Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800,’” *H-Atlantic – H-Net*, November 2009, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/16821/reviews/18906/antunes-curto-and-bethencourt-portuguese-oceanic-expansion-1400-1800>.

⁶⁰⁴ Vogt, “The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521.”

⁶⁰⁵ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 7.

⁶⁰⁶ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 24–27.

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- ⁶⁰⁷ Crone, “Introduction,” xxviii.
- ⁶⁰⁸ Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 469.
- ⁶⁰⁹ Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 116.
- ⁶¹⁰ Fernández-Armesto, “Portuguese Expansion in a Global Context,” 480; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450–1560*, 40.
- ⁶¹¹ Sá, “Ecclesiastical Structures and Religious Action,” 235; 255–256; 261.
- ⁶¹² John K. Thornton, “Perspectives on African Christianity,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, by Vera L. Hyatt (Washington u.a.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 169; 173; Worger, Clark, and Alpers, *Africa and the West*, 25–26.
- ⁶¹³ Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire, 1415-1808*, 93.
- ⁶¹⁴ Charles Ralph Boxer, ed., *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion, 1440-1770* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 3–4.
- ⁶¹⁵ F. O. Shyllon, *Black People in Britain: 1555-1833* (London ; New York: Published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, 1977), 51; Walter Rodney, “African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the Atlantic Slave-Trade,” *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 3 (1966): 431–43, doi:10.2307/180112.
- ⁶¹⁶ Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, sec. Introduction.
- ⁶¹⁷ Sá, “Ecclesiastical Structures and Religious Action,” 270.
- ⁶¹⁸ Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.
- ⁶¹⁹ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 249.
- ⁶²⁰ Charles Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion*.
- ⁶²¹ P. E. Russell, “Veni, Vidi, Vici: Some Fifteenth-Century Eyewitness Accounts of Travel in the African Atlantic Before 1492,” *Historical Research* 66, no. 160 (1993): 115–28.
- ⁶²² Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 12–13.

⁶²³ Zurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, sec. Chapter XXV, 85.

⁶²⁴ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 12.

⁶²⁵ William McKee Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the ‘Sons of Ham,’” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (February 1980): 15–16. See also, pages 26–27: “In retelling the story [of the Curse of Ham], one rabbi correspondingly darkened the face of Ham and made the curse of Noah read, ‘Your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned.’ If this writer magnified the curse, another likewise increased the offense for which it was punishment: ‘Ham and the dog copulated in the Ark, therefore Ham came forth black-skinned, while the dog publicly exposes its copulation. Still another commentator further vilified the delinquent ancestor of slaves by suggesting that Ham had not only looked upon his father’s nakedness but had castrated him as well.’”

⁶²⁶ Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 108.

⁶²⁷ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 18–19. Ham, alternatively Cham. “Nakedness” is thought to be symbolic of sodomy and incest. Also see David Brion Davis: “After illuminating the highly diverse ways in which Christians and Jews interpreted Genesis 9 and 10, “[Benjamin] Braude suggests that it was only in the period from 1589 to 1625 that the institution of African slavery began to influence English views of Noah’s curse as an explanation for both blackness of skin and perpetual servitude.” in “Constructing Race,” 9. See in the same issue of *TWMQ* the article from which Davis is quoting, Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods.”

⁶²⁸ See Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea,” 16: “Over the centuries theologians have often held ideas about nudity and respect for parents similar to those of the ancient Hebrews. Yet, they have consistently failed to find in Ham’s behavior sufficient justification for Noah’s curse upon Canaan. The story of Ham presents far fewer difficulties, however, if it is considered not as a moral tale but as sacred myth. One of the characteristics of myths, including sacred ones, is their amorality. In these accounts, divine or semidivine beings often commit deeds that violate or transcend the moral restraints of the ordinary people who believe in the myth...[This] would suggest that that the Curse of Noah, which was molded and elaborated for two thousand years, has functioned to interpret an area of continuing social tension.”

⁶²⁹ Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea,” 28; 34.

⁶³⁰ Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Chapter XVI, 54.

⁶³¹ Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea,” 39.

⁶³² Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Chapter XVI: 55.

⁶³³ Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea,” 39.

⁶³⁴ Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Chapter XVI: 54–55. See also Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” 128. [Portuguese original – “Chaim”]

⁶³⁵ Braude, “The Sons of Noah,” 148.

⁶³⁶ Braude, “The Sons of Noah,” 128.

⁶³⁷ Braude, “The Sons of Noah,” 116;120.

⁶³⁸ See Braude, “The Sons of Noah,” 128; and Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, in Chapter XVI writes in Braude’s translation: “And from his race [Ham] these Blacks are descended, as wrote the Archbishop Don Roderic of Toledo, and Josephus in his book on the *Antiquities of the Jews*, and Walter, with other authors who have spoken of the generations of Noah, from the time of his going out of the Ark.” Then in n.55 Braude explains: “In Josephus, the curse is directed...at Canaan. None of the cursed is identified as black, nor is any to be enslaved.”

⁶³⁹ Braude, “The Sons of Noah,” 129.

⁶⁴⁰ Russell-Wood, “Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery,” 34.

⁶⁴¹ Steven Flanders and David Brion Davis, “The Big Business of Slavery,” *The New York Review of Books*, April 8, 1999, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/04/08/the-big-business-of-slavery/>.

⁶⁴² Russell, “Veni, Vidi, Vici,” 115.

⁶⁴³ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 159.

⁶⁴⁴ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 157.

⁶⁴⁵ Valentin Y. Mudimbe, “Romanus Pontifex (1454) and the Expansion of Europe,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera L. Hyatt (Washington u.a.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 58–65.

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- ⁶⁴⁶ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 159.
- ⁶⁴⁷ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 157.
- ⁶⁴⁸ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 157.
- ⁶⁴⁹ Jonathan Locke Hart, *Comparing Empires: European Colonialism from Portuguese Expansion to the Spanish-American War* (Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13.
- ⁶⁵⁰ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 58; 63.
- ⁶⁵¹ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, 21–22.
- ⁶⁵² Mudimbe, “Romanus Pontifex (1454) and the Expansion of Europe,” 61. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 157.
- ⁶⁵³ Mudimbe, “Romanus Pontifex (1454) and the Expansion of Europe,” 58–65.
- ⁶⁵⁴ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 249; 254.
- ⁶⁵⁵ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 249.
- ⁶⁵⁶ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, 22.
- ⁶⁵⁷ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 6.
- ⁶⁵⁸ The Treaty of Tordesillas (Portuguese: Tratado de Tordesilhas, Spanish: Tratado de Tordesillas), signed at Tordesillas (now in Valladolid province, Spain), 7 June 1494, divided the “newly discovered” lands outside Europe between Spain and Portugal along a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands (off the west coast of Africa). This line of demarcation was about halfway between the Cape Verde Islands (already Portuguese) and the islands “discovered” by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage (claimed for Spain), named in the treaty as Cipangu and Antilia (Cuba and Hispaniola). The lands to the east would belong to Portugal and the lands to the west to Spain.
- ⁶⁵⁹ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, 3.
- ⁶⁶⁰ Sweet, “Spanish and Portuguese Influences,” 6–7.
- ⁶⁶¹ John Lang, *The Land of the Golden Trade* (S.l.: Forgotten Books, 2015).

⁶⁶² Reston, *Dogs of God*, 13.

⁶⁶³ Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 113.

⁶⁶⁴ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, 125.

⁶⁶⁵ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 6.

⁶⁶⁶ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 27; Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire*, 28.

⁶⁶⁷ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*.

⁶⁶⁸ Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 42.

⁶⁶⁹ Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 12.

⁶⁷⁰ Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 115.

⁶⁷¹ Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America 1415–1808*, 9; See Bovill, “The name Guinea is usually said to have been a corrupt form of the name Ghana, picked up by the Portuguese in the Maghrib.” However, Bovill points out, “The name Guinea has been in use both in the Maghrib and in Europe long before Prince Henry’s time... The modern application of the name Guinea to the coast dates only from 1481,” the year in which the Portuguese built the fort São Jorge da Mina (Elmina), and the Portuguese monarch acquired the title Lord of Guinea. *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 116 n. See also Jeffrey, “Guinea: Pointers to the Origin of This Word,” 666–669. Guinea “derives from the name Gunowa, written Gune by the Portuguese, which was the native name of the nearest Negro kingdom with which the Portuguese ... first made contact on the Atlantic coasts of Africa. The name was applied to the African coasts from the Gambia to the Benguella in Portuguese Angola.”

⁶⁷² Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 40.

⁶⁷³ Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 114.

⁶⁷⁴ *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene 5, 8.

⁶⁷⁵ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 27; Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 33.

⁶⁷⁶ Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 29.

⁶⁷⁷ Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 27–28.

⁶⁷⁸ Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 47; Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 66.

⁶⁷⁹ Historian Malyn Newitt says, “However, in 1478 the Portuguese surprised thirty–five Castilian ships returning from Mina and seized them and all their gold. Another...Castilian voyage to Mina, that of Eustache de la Fosse, was intercepted ... in 1480. ...All things considered, it is not surprising that the Portuguese emerged victorious from this first maritime colonial war. They were far better organised than the Castilians, were able to raise money for the preparation and supply of their fleets and, and had clear central direction....” In *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion*, 39–40.

⁶⁸⁰ Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 47; Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 34.

⁶⁸¹ Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History*, 56.

⁶⁸² Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire*, 29.

⁶⁸³ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 304.

⁶⁸⁴ Eldred D. Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 2; 11.

⁶⁸⁵ Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 150.

⁶⁸⁶ Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, xvi.

⁶⁸⁷ An annotated edition of his Angolan travel was reprinted from both of Purchas’ publications, the notes in *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* (1614); and *Purchas His Pilgrims* (1625) the latter of which published his own account, edited by E. G. Ravenstein, as *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel of Leigh in Angola and Adjoining Regions* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1901): 36–39. Reprinted in Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670*, 183–186.

⁶⁸⁸ Ivana Elbl, “The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521,” *Journal of African History*. 38 (1997): 31–75.

⁶⁸⁹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 154–55.

⁶⁹⁰ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 263; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 95. Vogt, “The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521,” 3.

⁶⁹¹ Vogt, “The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521,” 3.

⁶⁹² Horses were highly sought after on the Senegalese coast, and traded at a rate of between 9 and 14 slaves per horse.

⁶⁹³ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 310–311.

⁶⁹⁴ Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire*, 14; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450–1560*, 34–35.

⁶⁹⁵ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 294–295; Anthony Pagden, *Review of Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, by Stuart B. Schwartz, *The International History Review* 18, no. 2 (1996): 398–99, doi:10.2307/40107725.

⁶⁹⁶ Crone, “Introduction,” xxiii.

⁶⁹⁷ Bethencourt, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, 318.

⁶⁹⁸ Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*, 99–100.

⁶⁹⁹ *Hamlet*, 4,5.

⁷⁰⁰ Sá, “Ecclesiastical Structures and Religious Action,” 269.

⁷⁰¹ Elbl, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy,” 176. George E Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1993), 212; 218; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450–1560, Volume I*, 28–30.

⁷⁰² Cadamosto, *Voyages*, 77, 84.

⁷⁰³ Russell, *Prince Henry*, 305. See Joan M. Fayer, “African Interpreters in the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Anthropological Linguistics : Archives of Languages of the World* *Anthropological Linguistics* 45, no. 3 (2003): 281–95. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 106–108.

⁷⁰⁴ Joyce Appleby, *Shores of Knowledge*, 1;18.

⁷⁰⁵ Cadamosto also seemed able to imagine alternative aesthetics to European standards of beauty without expressing customary revulsion. “That woman who has the largest breasts is considered more beautiful than the other: with the result that each woman, to increase the size, at the age of seventeen or eighteen when the breasts are already formed, places across her chest a cord, which she binds around the breasts, and draws tight with much force; in this way the breasts are distended, and frequent pulling every day causes them to grow and lengthen so much that many reach the navel. Those that have the biggest prize them as a rare thing.” Cadamosto and Crone, *Voyages*, 20–21. Jennifer L Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle Over their Shoulder:’ Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 167–92.

⁷⁰⁶ Dening, *Performances*, 204; 44.

⁷⁰⁷ Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 131–132; 134.

⁷⁰⁸ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 2.

⁷⁰⁹ Plumb, in Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, xxii.

⁷¹⁰ Plumb, in Boxer *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, xxii.

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⁷⁷⁹ See Russell, “White Kings on Black Kings: Rui de Pina and the Problem of Black African Sovereignty,” 151–163.

⁷⁸⁰ Ringrose, *Expansion*, xiv.

⁷⁸¹ Just War theory is a doctrine of military ethics of Roman philosophical and Catholic origin studied by moral theologians, ethicists and international policy makers which holds that a conflict can and ought to meet the criteria of philosophical, religious or political justice, provided it follows certain conditions. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey the Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), xiv.

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⁷⁹⁸ Just War theory is a doctrine of military ethics of Roman philosophical and Catholic origin studied by moral theologians, ethicists and international policy makers which holds that a conflict can and ought to meet the criteria of philosophical, religious or political justice, provided it follows certain conditions. Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The Afro–American Ordeal in Slavery*, xiv.

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⁸⁰⁸ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 74–76; 87–88.

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PART TWO: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 32. Map of the Ottoman Empire circa 1570, showing Venice and Cyprus.
<http://eq-ot.blogspot.com/2010/06/context-ottoman-venetian-wars-1570-1573.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 33. Map showing the West African Kingdoms in the 1500s.
<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/module-twenty-three-activity-two/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 35. Unknown artist, *The Conquest of Tenochtitlán*, from the *Conquest of México series*, c. 1650s. Oil on canvas. Mexico. Jay I. Kislak Collection Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, US.

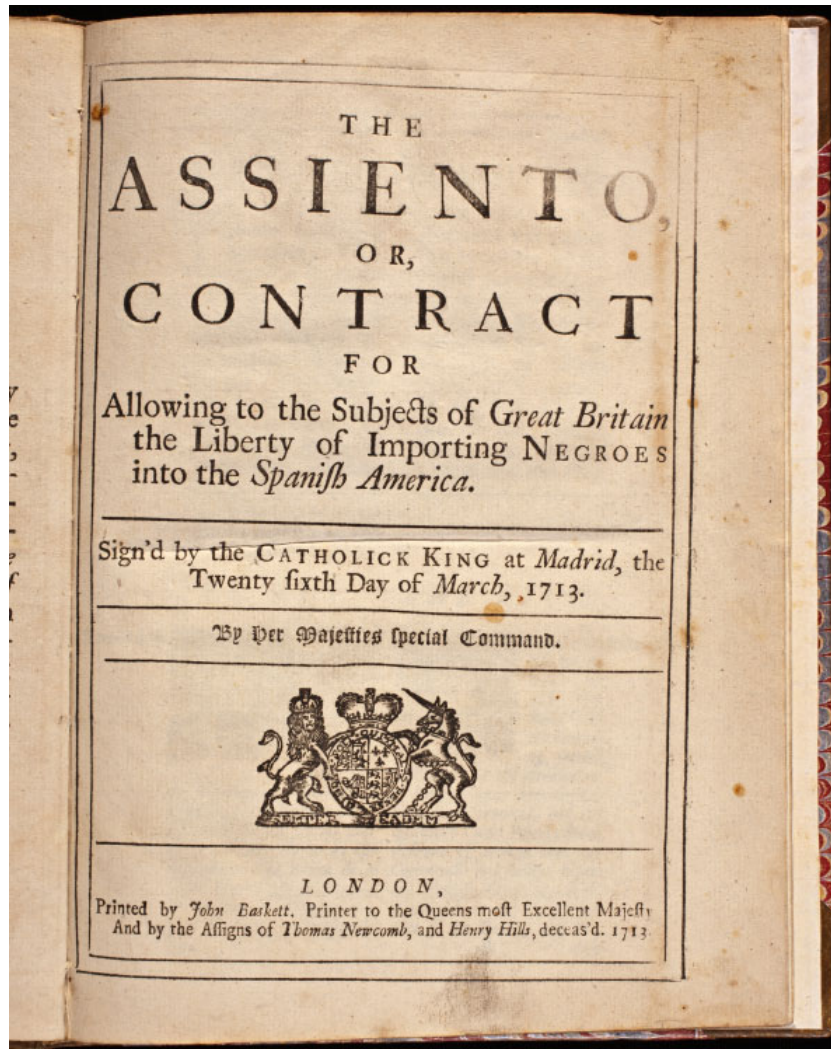


Figure 36. John Baskett, *Assiento to the English*, London, 1713. The Assiento, or, contract, for allowing to the subjects of Great Britain the liberty of importing negroes into the Spanish America. <http://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/?id=A0146>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 37. Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, Band 1, 1572. Detail showing Elmina from the sea. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg. <http://diglit.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/braun1582bd1>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 38. Elmina Castle in Ghana, n/d. Photograph by tacticalfanboy.com
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Figure 39. Fort St. Anthony from Axim town, Ghana, in 2003. Photograph by Mark Moxon. <https://www.moxon.net/ghana/axim.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 40. Fort San Sebastian in Shama, Ghana, in 2011. Photograph by Mr. Valenzuela. http://mrvalenzuela.com/?page_id=3496, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 41. Detail Map of Castile & Leon in 1360. Reproduced from J.B. Bury, *Atlas to Freeman's Historical Geography* (Longmans Green and Co., 3rd Edition, 1903). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/spanish_kingdoms.html, accessed December, 2017.

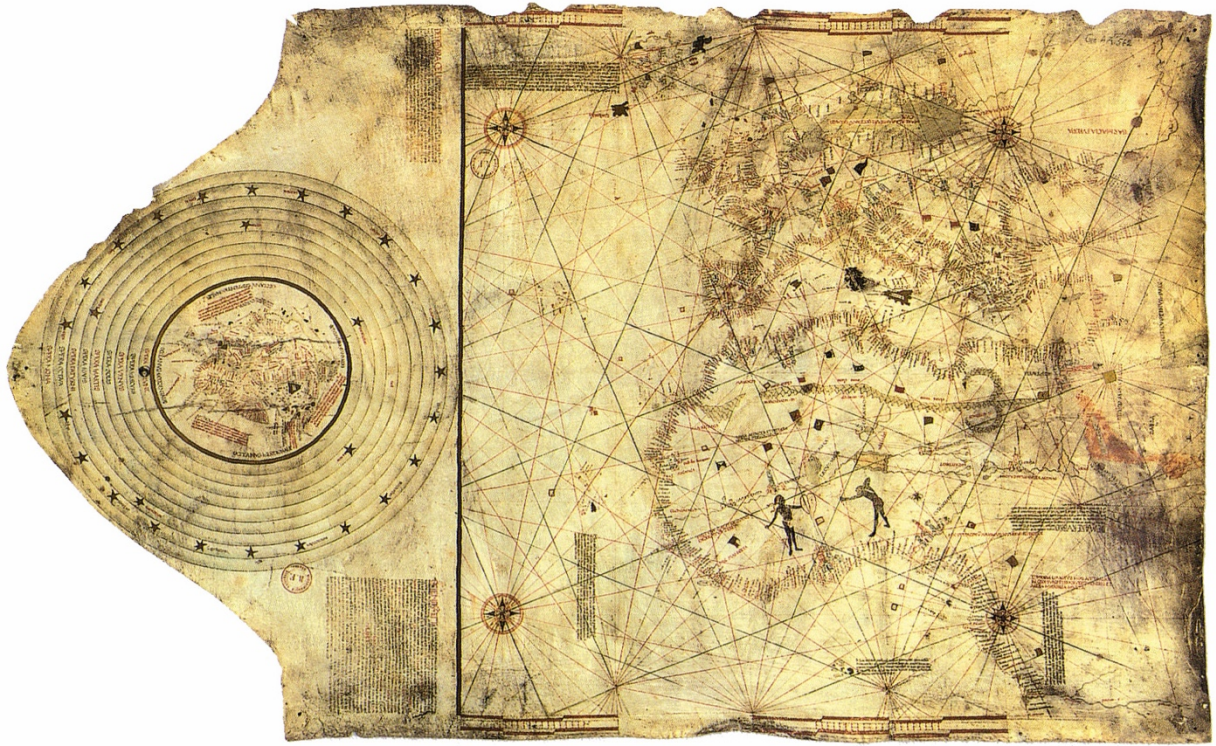


Figure 43. Attributed to the workshop of Bartolomeo and Christopher Columbus, *Columbus Map*, c. 1490, Lisbon. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Triangular Trade

(The Atlantic Circuit)



Figure 44. Map of Africa and the Atlantic World showing the Triangular Trade. Map © by mr_rodriguez23. https://www.slideshare.net/mr_rodriguez23/africa-and-the-atlantic-world-presentation, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 45. “Door of No Return Elmina,” the portal of sorrow of the house of slaves, Gorée, Senegal, n/d. Photograph by Wandering Angel.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/86518301@N00/310101997>, accessed December, 2017.

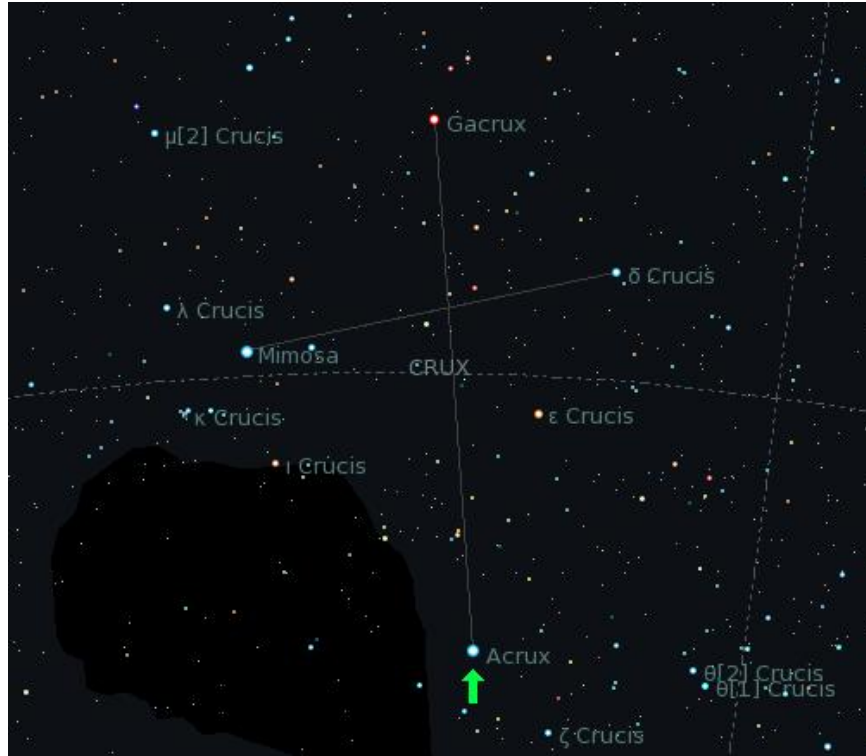


Figure 46. Illustration showing the stars of the Southern Cross. Illustration © by Alain r. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Acrux_kstars.png, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 47. Beach in Cape Coast, Ghana, n/d. Photograph by Ben Sutherland.
https://cdn.theculturetrip.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/5517786290_c65e9e3dfd_b-1024x678.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 48. The Ca' da Mosto, Venice, n/d. Photograph by Adriano.
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Figure 49. Sankore Mosque in Timbuktu, 2012. Photograph by CNN.com.
<https://www.cnn.com/2012/07/12/world/africa/mali-shrines-destroyed/index.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 50. Map showing the difference between Ghana Empire and Modern Ghana. Map © by Janekeshop.wordpress.com. <https://janakesho1.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/old-ghana-empire-wagadou/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 51. Map showing the Sahara Desert and the main rivers of West Africa. Map © by Jim Jones, 2010. <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/maps/wafr-br.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 52. Sapi people (Guinea Coast, Sierra Leone), Oliphant, late 15th–mid-17th Century. Elephant ivory tusk and metal, 3 1/2 x 20 3/4 in. (8.9 x 52.7 cm). Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933, Collection. Yale University Art Gallery. <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/84390>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 53. Edo people (Bini-Portuguese, Benin), Saltcellar, Portuguese Figures, c. 1525–1600. Ivory, 7.5 x W. 3 in. (19.1 x 7.6 cm). “This saltcellar created by a Benin ivory carver reflects a local interest and emphasis on extensive detailing of dress and regalia found in other forms of Benin court art. Articulated in exacting detail, four Portuguese male figures, two richly adorned men and their attendants, are depicted around the perimeter of the receptacle. The higher status figures are depicted frontally, facing outward. The attendants are in profile, more crudely rendered, and in motion.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/309900>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 54. Sapi people (Sierra Leone), Saltcellar: Portuguese Figure, c. 1490-1530. Ivory, height: 13 1/4". The British Museum, London.



Figure 55. Akan peoples (Ghana), Three Gold Weights: Sword, Fly Whisk, Amulet, 18th-19th Century. Brass. “Cast brass gold weights, known as abrammuo ... were developed by Akan merchants and rulers to standardize the trade in gold dust from mines in present-day Ghana in networks of exchange that extended beyond the Sahara Desert. Domestically, gold was valued by the Akan kings for its decorative and symbolic qualities.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1994.312.7,8_1994.312.10/, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 56. Edo peoples (Court of Benin, Nigeria), Seated Portuguese Figure, 18th Century. Brass, 5 in. H x 2 in. W x 2 3/8 in. “This tiny figure of a seated Portuguese man is a type of cast brass sculpture displayed on royal ancestral altars within the palace compound. Given its small size, it may have originally been a component of a larger work, now lost, such as an altar tableau (*aseberia*) or a brass altar to the hand (*ikegobo*).” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1991.17.31/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 57. Edo Peoples (Benin City, Nigeria), Cast brass figure of a Portuguese soldier, 17th Century. The British Museum, London.



Figure 58. Akan peoples (Ghana) Memorial Head (Nsodie), 17th–mid-18th Century. Terracotta, roots, quartz fragments, H. 8 x W. 5 5/8 x D. 5 in. (20.3 x 14.3 x 12.7 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1967. “This elegant terracotta head is a memorial portrait (nsodie) of an Akan ruler from present-day southern Ghana or southeastern Côte d'Ivoire. It is an idealized representation whose serene expression, well-balanced features, and striated neck suggest the positive qualities such rulers are expected to embody.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 59. Democratic Republic of Congo; Kongo, Central Africa. Nkisi, Male Power Figure, 19-20th Century. Wood, paint, nails, cloth, beads, shells, arrows, leather, nuts, twine. "This work was the product of an intense collaboration between a sculptor and the initiated priest "nganga," who controlled its use in his professional practice. After an artist completed carving the artifact, the "nganga" transformed it into an object capable of healing illness, settling disputes, safeguarding the peace, and punishing wrongdoers." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/312342>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 60. Map showing Andalusia, Spain. © Google Maps.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 61. Palácio Nacional de Sintra, Swan Hall, Portugal, 2017. UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. Photography of the Swan Hall showing the Moorish style influence.

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<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-swan-hall-national-palace-palcio-nacional-de-sintra-unesco-world-cultural-164542790.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 62. Street of Granada, Spain, n/d. No copyright information.
<https://i.pinimg.com/236x/d3/a8/6a/d3a86a07f284fff8701bcc0cc74f6060.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 63. View of Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain, n/d. Photo © by AP/FOTOLIA 277. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/spain/andalusia/granada/articles/Granada-Spain-guide-to-visiting-the-Alhambra/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 64. Illustration showing the Dockyards of Seville (Plano de las Atarazanas), Spain, in XVI Century. Asociacion Amigos de Los Jardines de la Oliva, Sevilla.
<https://jardinesdelaoliva.wordpress.com/2016/10/20/nuestro-apoyo-a-la-conservacion-de-las-atarazanas-de-sevilla/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 65. Francisco Pradilla Ortiz, *The Capitulation of Granada*, 1882. Oil on Canvas. Painting Showing Muhammad XII (Boabdil) surrendering to Ferdinand II of Aragon, and Isabella I of Castile in 1492. Courtesy of the Palace of the Senate, Spain.



Figure 66. Unknown author, Portrait assumed to be of Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator (Infante D. Henrique), inserted as the frontispiece in a 15th C. edition of Gomes Eanes de Zurara's 1453 book *Crónicas dos Feitos de Guiné*. *Crónicas dos Feitos de Guiné* by Gomes Eanes de Zurara. Codex of Bibliothèque nationale de Paris.



Figure 67. Memorial to Henry the Navigator, Infante D. Henrique, on the Praça da República in Lagos, Portugal, n/d. Photograph © by Expedia.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 68. Aerial View of lighthouse and cliffs at Cape St. Vincent. Europe's most South-western point, Sagres, Algarve, Portugal, n/d. Photograph by Ageofstock.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 69. Henry the Navigator's Compass Rose and Discovery School, Cape St. Vincent, Sagres, Portugal, 2012. Photograph by Eric and Heather Nelson. <http://ericandheathernelson.blogspot.com/2012/09/prince-henry-navigators-discovery-school.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 70. A small church within the Fortaleza de Sagres, Portugal, n/d. Photograph by Brad Stell. <http://www.fathomaway.com/eye-candy-sagres-portugal/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 71. Padrão dos Descobrimentos, Tagus River, Lisbon, Portugal, 2017. Photograph by Ajay Suresh. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Belem-3_\(34224859085\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Belem-3_(34224859085).jpg), accessed December, 2017.

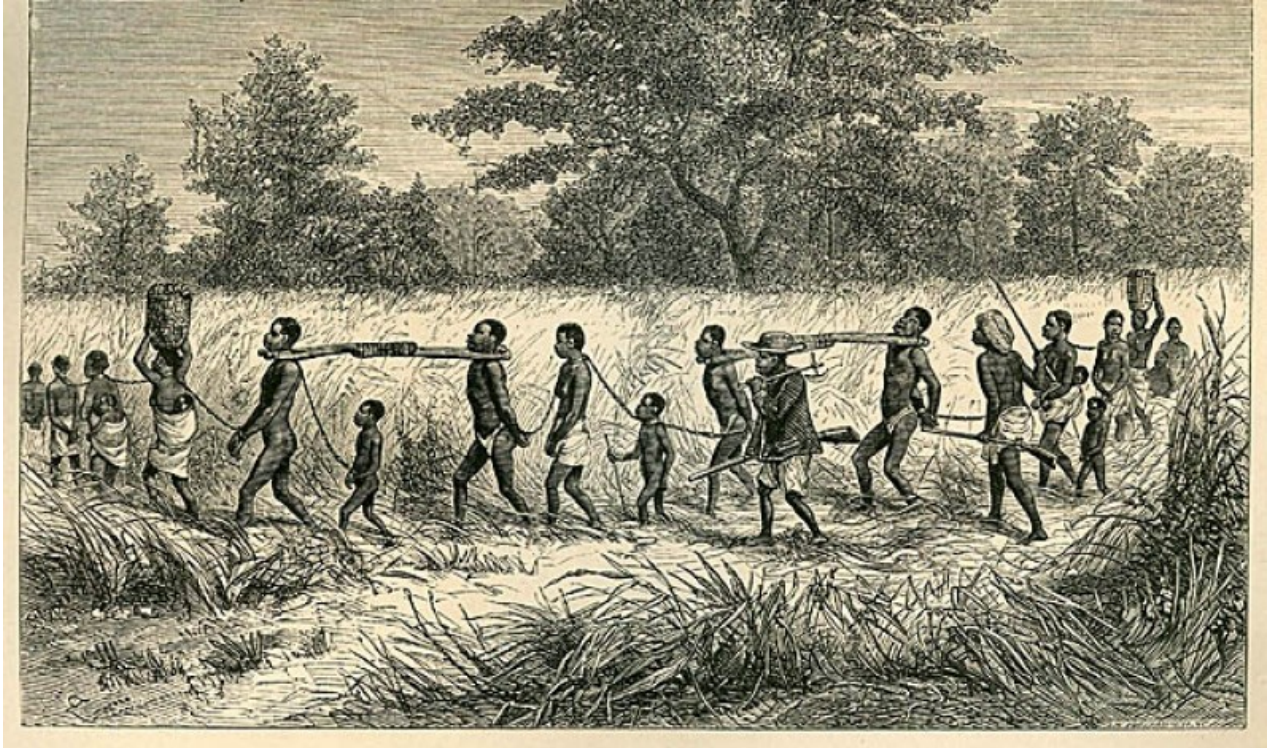


Figure 72. Image showing Portuguese slavery. Engraving of a caravan of slaves in David Livingstone, (1813-1873). Narrative of an expedition to the Zambezi (London, 1865). Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal.



Figure 73. Map showing Slave Ports in West Africa in 1750. “Here identified those ports held by the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Danish. Gorée Island, the slave trading port opposite Dakar, Senegal, is only three kilometers from the coast and cannot be seen on this map. In addition to these ports were slave trading locations on the east side of Africa, at Mozambique, Zanzibar, and Madagascar.” Map by Slavery in America.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 74. Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, *Lisbona, Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 1572 (edition of 1593). Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

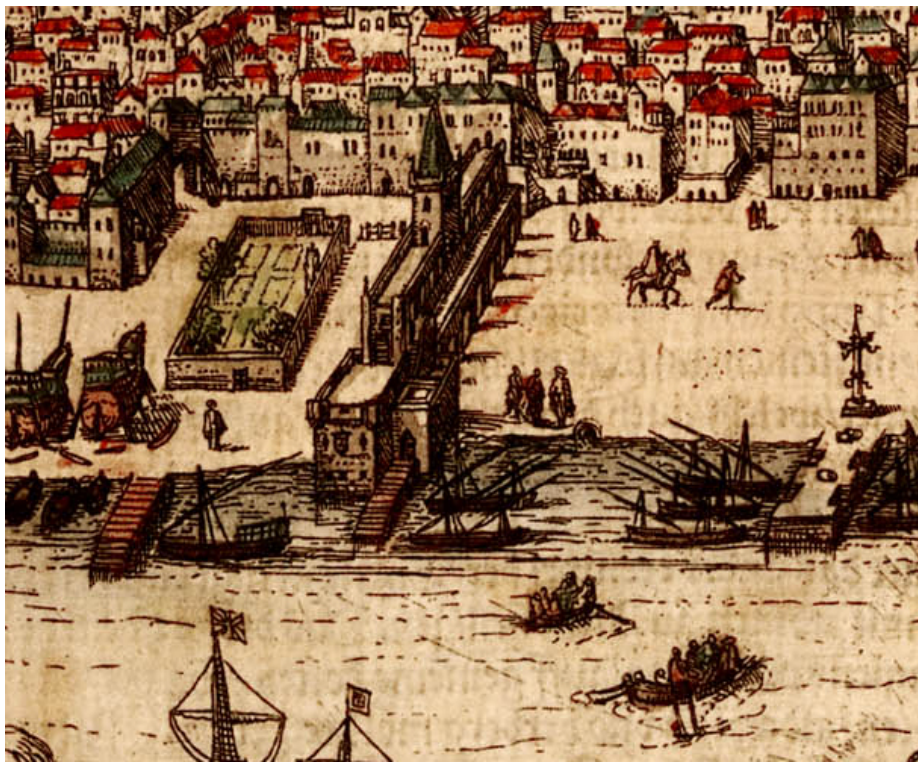


Figure 75. Detail of figure 74, showing the Ribeira Palace in Lisbon, Portugal.



Figure 76. Peter Paul Rubens, *Portret van Paus Nicolas V*, 1612-1616.
Museum Plantin-Moretus, Stad Antwerpen.
<http://search.museumplantinmoretus.be/details/collect/209877>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 77. Map showing general depiction of the winds (green) and currents (blue) and the approximate sailing routes (red) of Portuguese navigators during the era of Henry the Navigator (c.1430-1460). The further south the ships go, the wider the return, and the more open sea sailing required. 2011. Map by Henry Walrasiad, based on the description in Gago Coutinho, 1951, *A Náutica dos Descobrimentos*. Accessed: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Henrican_navigation_routes.gif, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 78. “An 18th Century Persian astrolabe – maker unknown. The points of the curved spikes on the front *rete* plate, mark the positions of the brightest stars. The name of each star being labeled at the base of each spike. The back plate, or *mater* is engraved with projected coordinate lines.” From the Whipple Museum of the History of Science in Cambridge. Photograph by Andrew Dunn, 5 November, 2004. <http://www.andrewdunnphoto.com/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 79. Unknown Author, *Port of Lagos*, 16th Century. A medieval painting showing a caravel being provisioned in the port of Lagos, Portugal, depicting Africans and Europeans. Museum of the Forte da Ponta da Bandeira, Portugal. Photographed by Georges Jansoone. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lagos43_kopie.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 80. Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514), *Headless figure*, 1493. One of the illustrations from the Nuremberg Chronicle. Beloit College, Wisconsin.



Figure 81. Junius Brutus Stearns, *George Washington, First President of the United States In the fields of Mount Vernon, his plantation in Fairfax County, Virginia. In the lower left corner are his stepchildren, John and Martha Parke Custis*, 1853. Lithograph after a painting. The Granger Collection, New York City.




Figure 82. Unknown artist, *Virginian Luxeries*, c. 1825.

Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evr4334mets.xml, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 83. Jane Pitford Braddick Peticolas, *View of the West Front of Monticello*, c. 1827. Copyprint of watercolor on paper. Courtesy of Monticello/Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jefflife.html#008b>, accessed December, 2017.



RUN away from the subscriber
in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*,
about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low,
inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light;
he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his
left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters
work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is
greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is inso-
lent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears
much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with
him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is ex-
pected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoe-
makers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that
way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall
have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere
within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from
THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Figure 84. Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon, Thomas Jefferson Slavery Advertisement, September 14, 1769. <https://www.virginiahistory.org/what-you-can-see/story-virginia/explore-story-virginia/1825-1861/slavery>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 85. Alexander Marquis, *Portrait of John Wayles Jefferson (1808–1856)*, 1864. Wayles was Eston Jefferson's son, Sally Hemmings's great-grandson. Museum of Wisconsin Art.



Figure 86. Josiah Wedgwood, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?," 1787. Illustration used in the British-American Anti-Slavery Campaign of 1837. Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division Washington, D.C.
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661312/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 87. William Hole based on John Smith's description, *A Map of Virginia: With a Description of the Countrey, the Commodities, People, Government and Religion* (Detail), 1608. Engraving. "Smith's map, first published in England in 1624, was the primary map of the Chesapeake region used by colonists for nearly a century." Courtesy of Library of Virginia. <https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 88. Unknown artist, *Tobacco ad card, Newman's best Virginia*, mid-1700s. Courtesy Heal Collection, Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, London.

**PART THREE: OTHELLO IN THE COMPASS OF THE OF
THE 'WINE-DARK SEA'**

**CHAPTER NINE
LA SERENISSIMA
Othello in Venice**

**CHAPTER TEN
CYPRUS
and
THE TURKS**

LEPANTO

*Desist, O tempter! Gabriel, come,
O thou archangel true,
Whome I haue oft in message sent
To realmes and townes anew.*

*Go quicklie hence to Venice towne,
And put into their mindes
To take reuenge of wrongs the Turks
Haue done in sundrie kinds.*

– James VI of Scotland (1591)

I would have to address the most eminent men in the Ottoman court. Perhaps the Great Admiral, or one of the viziers, or even the Sultan himself. He wanted to hear the information about Nicosia from me. He wanted them to ask me their questions, to convince himself that Cyprus could be conquered, with little effort and in a few months.

– Wu Ming, *Altai, A Novel* (2014)⁸¹³

You are welcome, Sir, to Cyprus. Goats and monkeys!

– William Shakespeare, *Othello*

CHAPTER NINE: LA SERENISSIMA

Othello in Venice

OTHELLO. ... *I have done the state some service, and they know't.*

– *Othello*: Act 5, Scene 2

The Moor of Venice

Virginia Vaughan calls Othello's blackness "the visual signifier of his Otherness."⁸¹⁴

His skin color graphically denotes his status in sixteenth century Venice (depicted in an engraving from the period, fig. 89) as an outsider from a faraway land and insures that Othello is read as Other. This is crucial to the dramatic action and character motivation within the world of the play. His blackness demonstrates his extreme difference and explains why Othello is vulnerable to manipulation in ways natives of the city, or European visitors to Venice are not.

Othello must navigate the alienation of an exotic stranger, even in the most cosmopolitan of European cities. Othello straddles Venetian society as both a stranger and an accepted, loyal servant of the state: The extent to which his blackness alienates him is mitigated by his great abilities. The valuable service Othello offers the Venetian Senate as a general commanding the state's armed forces eclipses any concern the government has over his ethnic difference, and so he rises to prominence on the basis of his merits. It is because of his many honors and attributes, that Othello is lulled into thinking the more open society of

Venice that has adopted him will look the other way at a discrete elopement. It is fatal miscalculation. Still, Othello is not entirely wrong. For the Duke himself expresses an acceptable degree tolerance for the marriage.

Consequently, we cannot overlook the fact that “Othello’s blackness is symbolically crucial to the play and thus the character was meant to be played with a black skin,” says Kim F. Hall.⁸¹⁵ After all this is the story of “The Moor of Venice.” The construction of race is so ingrained in *Othello* that its absence turns the drama from a work of cultural and political significance, an exegesis on difference, about the fear of competition from a talented aspirational black man, into a bedroom drama about marital infidelity, which eviscerates the text.

In sixteenth century Venice, Othello and Desdemona live on the cusp of a racialized social order, operating from the rare perspective of highly developed personal consciousness. They, as an interracial couple, transcend their profound differences based on race, culture and gender by *embracing* Otherness through empathy:

OTHELLO. *She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.*

(*Arden 3*, 1.3.128-170)

But their enlightened attitudes, to say nothing of their physical union, represent a threat to the status quo. Their actions make a mockery of the notions of cultural and racial hegemony that bind Venetian (and Elizabethan) society. Desdemona has no illusions. She knows that she has chosen a path outside of custom in her marriage to Othello: “That I did love the Moor to live with him / My downright violence and scorn of fortunes / May trumpet to the world” (1.3.249-251). They love, after all, in a society stratified by color prejudice and

ethnic order. Ironically, Othello's fine character, his unimpeachable appropriateness as a husband – in all matters but skin color – expressed, above all, through his civility, is not his protection. It is, in fact, the real danger, because it shows him too much like “us.” This is a condition far more unsettlingly for Renaissance Europeans than the comparisons of self to the brute, black slave most often associated with people of African descent.

Through his marriage to a white woman, Othello crosses the proverbial line in the liminal space he must deftly straddle between “same” and “other”, in order to be a black man of consequence in a white world. It is the act of miscegenation that brands his presumptive “inbetweenness” a lethal transgression. His fellowship can be tolerated, and his nobility accepted as a warrior in service, but not as one who demands rights of kinship. Iago is not motiveless. He must protect what he sees as the natural order of the world, white privilege, achieved through racial purity. Iago will demonstrate his racism in the extreme by becoming the instrument whereby Othello strips himself of his dignity and humanity. In the end, Othello will destroy himself, and the woman he loves; but only after he kills everything he values in himself.

Othello's Occupation

Othello's sense of self must come from his occupation—peripatetic mercenary, for it is a commonplace of Othello criticism that the hero is an alien in Venice and that his unfamiliarity with its customs contributes to his vulnerability.

– Vaughan, 1994, 22.

Othello has a special status among the Venetians because the state needs him. He can do them service as their chosen protector, “the chivalric knight who will rescue Venice from

the greedy dragon.” The Moor is a *condottiere*, one who “fights by contract for the Venetian Republic.” As a prototype, Othello is representative of “what European warfare would become:” “the permanent professional army of modern time.”⁸¹⁶ It became increasingly common in the sixteenth century that “the soldier stayed armed and frequently joined mercenary bands that moved around Europe.” Worried that the mercenary was dependent on a “contractor” not on a “government” for his money “Venetian state policy required the use of a foreign Captain General in times of national crisis” to insure the soldier had no local political loyalties.⁸¹⁷ As a former slave, deprived of country, custom and kin, Othello is preternaturally alone. His isolation is signified by his blackness, which sets him apart from local culture and society, branding him the quintessential outsider.

Othello, Soldier Slave

To understand how Othello arrived at becoming a general in Venice we need to look at the relationship between slaves and the military in the early modern world.

An ignominious feature shared by Christianity, Judaism and Islam – the religions of the sons of Abraham – is their countenance of slavery (fig. 90). It would be safe to say that major religions “usually remain major because they sanctify whatever is the social structure of the day.”⁸¹⁸ To be fair, slavery was also an African social institution. It “was possibly the most important avenue for private, reproducing wealth available to Africans,”⁸¹⁹ John Thornton tells us. “Muslim slavery was as fully developed as anything the Roman world had known, and it has only recently ended,” writes William D. Phillips, Jr. in *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Atlantic Slave Trade* (1985). Considering news from Mauritania and the

present horrors in the Sudan, it has yet to end. David Brion Davis notes that,

there was a genuine continuity of slave-trading and slaveholding from ancient Greece to Rome and from the late Roman Empire to the Byzantine and Arab worlds, from the medieval shipment to slaves from the Balkans, the Black Sea, and Caucasia to Muslim and Christian Mediterranean markets, and from there to the beginnings of the fifteenth century of African slave trade with Portugal and Spain, and then the Atlantic Islands and New World.⁸²⁰

The Koran sanctions slavery as an institution, as it also admonishes slave owners to care well for their human property.⁸²¹ Slaves in the Islamic world did have legal rights, but “their civil status was severely circumscribed.”⁸²² It is pertinent that “by the ninth century, Muslims were making distinctions between black and white slaves” in the land of Iraq.⁸²³ “The Caliph in Baghdad at the beginning of the tenth century had seven thousand black eunuchs and four thousand white ones in his palace.”⁸²⁴

What would be shocking to most, is the staggering statistic that demonstrates that Muslim world slavery rivals the Atlantic slave trade in the sheer estimated number of its victims, with 11.5 to 14 million people forced into bondage since its inception over one thousand years ago. So why do we hear so relatively little in the West about this “other” slave trade? Ronald Segal, the South African author of *Islam’s Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*, suggests that this is because Muslim world slavery “never became the publicly fought moral and political issue that it did in the United States and Europe;” and because “Islamic slavery began long before the Atlantic slave trade.”⁸²⁵ Phillips identifies “three strands – past practice, traditions of conquered societies, and religion – “that ‘intertwined to bind slavery into the fabric of Islamic society.”⁸²⁶ Racial and cultural stereotypes were a by-product of this nefarious activity. “The inescapable constants were that almost all of these blacks or their ancestors had arrived as slaves and that their blackness was and immutable

badge of inferiority. Negative racial stereotypes crystallized in the minds of whites over the duration of the trans-Saharan slave trade.”⁸²⁷

One hundred years after Muhammad established the creed of Islam in Arabia in the seventh century, “its call to prayer rang from minarets all the way from the Atlantic to the outskirts of China, and empire larger than Rome’s at its zenith.” The Muslims who conquered Spain were named by history “‘Moors’ probably because they arrived by way of Morocco [or/ Mauritania]. The Moors themselves never used the term. These men, for they brought with them no women, were ‘Arabs, from Damascus and Medina, leading armies of North African Berber converts.’ They intermarried among the ‘Spanish Visigoth families or took fair-skinned Galician slaves to wife.’ They held power for hundreds of years,⁸²⁸ in fact, ‘from 711 until their expulsion in 1492.’⁸²⁹ According to Robin Blackburn, ‘The swift Muslim advance in the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century must itself have been facilitated by the tensions generated by a social order that relied to such an extent on enslavement.’⁸³⁰ He says that the first black African slaves in Europe were to be found in 15th century Muslim Spain. Phillips, however, places this date much earlier: ‘Blacks from Africa south of the Sahara arrived beginning in the eleventh century, a consequence of the increased Islamic penetration into sub-Saharan Africa.’⁸³¹ Blackburn is making the distinction, I believe, between the Islamic slave trade in earlier centuries and the Portuguese involvement that began in the 1400s.

The only prohibition against slavery in the Spanish Islamic world was that a *Mozárabe*, (a Christian living under Muslim rule), could not enslave a Muslim or own a Muslim as a slave. Many Christians, however, were the slaves of Muslims. Furthermore, a Muslim could not sell himself or his children into slavery. The status of Christians under Muslim rule evolved, however, and by the time we get to “the ninth and tenth centuries,

Mozárabes could purchase slaves who reached the peninsula through the Islamic slave trade.”⁸³² “The enslavement of captives in warfare excluded Muslim ones, on the basis that Muslims would not war against each other, and the enslavement of unbelievers was but a compensation for Muslim deaths in lawful war and a way of promoting conversion to the faith.”⁸³³ This certainly contributed to the prevailing trend that deemed enslavement as “a condition that best suited sub-Saharan Africans.” Furthermore, the curse of Ham offered doctrinal justification for the debasement of black Africans, (as it did later with the Europeans); and finally, “the ethnically fragmented nations of Africa” made them a more vulnerable target the then stabilizing and military powerful European States” that Muslims had also targeted for trade in humans. “The vilification of blacks was constantly being refined as blackness and slavery came to be regarded as synonymous.”⁸³⁴

After 1031, when the caliphate was abandoned in Islamic Spain,⁸³⁵ sub-Saharan Africans were “probably sold by North African merchants to the Muslim *ta’ifas*,”⁸³⁶ i.e. numerous independent factionalized kingdoms at war with each other.⁸³⁷ As well as functioning as administrators and household domestics and artisans, a number of the male slaves served in the military.⁸³⁸ A feature distinguishing Muslim slavery from the practice of the institution in European societies was this deployment of slave men as troops, “who at times even seized the reigns of government.”⁸³⁹ They were enslaved men who “made and unmade rulers.”⁸⁴⁰ These elite soldiers were called Mamluks.

The widespread use of slave troops, the Mamluks, was the most unusual aspect of Islamic slavery. The origin of the Mamluks was in the ninth century, when the future caliph as-Mamun began to build a personal army of slaves ... The original impetus for the use of slave troops was a fairly simple one: They were loyal. Completely cut off from their homelands and families, their only allegiances were to themselves and their master.⁸⁴¹

So, it was the Mamluks' very alienation from their place of origin, a condition of slavery, that made them uniquely valuable. Loyalty was a rare and precious commodity for those who held power in the Islamic world. Factionalism was endemic, exacerbated by a plethora of ethnic and linguistic distinctions along with political squabbles and family disputes. This is exactly the logic that makes hiring Othello as a mercenary to command the forces of the Republic of Venice a preferred choice of the Senate.

Most of the Mamluks were "Turks, Circasians or others from the Black Sea or Caspian regions."⁸⁴² In fact, the term '*mamluk*' was originally used to distinguish European white slaves from the word '*adb*' for black slaves.⁸⁴³ But, "some [Mamluks] were sub-Saharan Africans."⁸⁴⁴

Mamluks went through a training program designed to reward loyalty. Young recruits were placed under a 'tent commander' and trained in infantry tactics during their first year. In the second year, they were given horses; and in the third year, elaborate belts indicating their rank. In the fifth year, they gained better trappings for their mounts and better weapons for themselves. Ordinarily, in the seventh year a Mamluk was eligible for the office of tent commander. Thereafter, he could rise as far as his ability and skill at intrigue permitted.⁸⁴⁵

Most critically, a Mamluk could "attain freedom." Furthermore, "many Mamluks rose to high office. Some even becoming heads of state."⁸⁴⁶ There is evidence that "an Ethiopian slave became vizier to the sultan of Delhi and later governor of a province. A caliph who ruled in Egypt for most of the 11th century was the son of a black slave concubine. A Slavic slave—not all slaves were Africans—was governor of Valencia in Islamic Spain."⁸⁴⁷ Among the "servile class" of Islamic Spain, Mamluks played an important role from the time "mercenary soldiers first appeared under al-Hakim (796-822)." Most were Slavs, some were Berbers, but "we read of special guard units composed of blacks."

Far from being ordinary slaves, the Mamluks should be compared to the *familia*

Cesaris of the Roman Empire. The members of both groups were legally slaves but were also part of a prestigious organization that gave them communal support and companionship and that offered them a path to freedom and power.⁸⁴⁸

The marriage in 1469 of Prince Ferdinand of Aragon to Princess Isabella of Castile created a uniting of “Christian Spain under their rule,” and they “waged war against Moorish potentates to the south.”⁸⁴⁹ After the siege of Malaga in 1487, one hundred among the remaining number of an “elite corps of 3,000 African slave soldiers,” who were vanquished in the battle, were sent to the Pope as ‘a gift.’” Could a young “Othello” have been among them? Others were sold abroad to “defray expenses.”⁸⁵⁰ Also, the Spanish Inquisition was established, and lasted a protracted period. Before it was over “an estimated three million Muslims and Jews had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, and thousands died.”⁸⁵¹ “The conquest of Granada by the Catholic sovereigns of Spain in 1492 drove many Moors into exile. For this they took revenge through piratical attacks on the Spanish coast. Could this be how “Othello,” sub-Saharan African, became associated with Barbary” and “Mauritania?

“By the fifteenth century, many Iberian Christians had internalized the racist attitudes of the Muslims and were applying them to the increasing flow of Africans slave to their part of the world.”⁸⁵² From mid-fifteenth century on the Portuguese forays along the coast of West Africa led to a steady flow of captive Africans into the Iberian Peninsula. The populations of Lisbon and Seville were ten percent were African slaves by 1500.⁸⁵³ “Although most of the slaves available in the port towns of Lisbon, Valencia, and Seville (fig. 91) in the 1470’s and 1480’s came from Western Africa, Jolof in particular, by 1512 ‘Manicongos’ (fig. 92) were arriving in Seville, and Portuguese reports of 1513 mention a whole ship from Kongo making delivery in Europe.” It only took twenty years for the central African slave trade to eclipse the established trade with West Africa.⁸⁵⁴

African nobles occasionally were brought to Lisbon as part of the “Monarch’s diplomatic, commercial and religious projects.” These foreign guests were thought to lend prestige to the courts. They were particularly prized for their musical skill, among other attributes.⁸⁵⁵ Even though domestic slavery remained legal in Spain over a hundred years, by the seventeenth century the traffic in “new” African slaves had come to an end. This certainly had to do with the fact that the New World Atlantic slave trade was a much more lucrative enterprise than the older Mediterranean markets.⁸⁵⁶

John Thornton in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* boldly asserts: “The Atlantic slave trade and African participation in it had solid origins in African societies and legal systems.” He points out that “[t]he institution of slavery was widespread in Africa and accepted in all the exporting regions, and the capture, purchase, transport, and sale of slaves was a regular feature of African society.” As a result of “[t]his preexisting social arrangement” Africans were as “much responsible as any external force for the development of the African slave trade.”⁸⁵⁷ “[T]he concept of an African ‘race’ was the invention of Western rationalists, and most African merchants saw themselves as selling people other than their own.”⁸⁵⁸ In sub-Saharan Africa, Islam was present as a practiced religion in Senegambia, the interior of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and the Bight of Benin.⁸⁵⁹

As a consequence of Berber and Arab commercial activity, Islam had penetrated the savannah below the Sahara by the beginning of the ninth century. Some subsaharan African (or “Sudanese”) merchants living in the *sahil* (or sahel, literally “shore” or transition zone between the desert and the savannah) and the savannah began to convert, so the Islam became associated with trade, especially long distance networks of exchange. In some societies political rulers also converted to the new religion with varying degrees of fidelity, so that Islam became a vehicle which forged alliances between commercial and political elites. Islam continued to grow slowly throughout West Africa in to the sixteenth century, dramatically increasing its adherents.⁸⁶⁰

Michael A. Gomez recounts in *Exchanging Our Country Marks* how there were great tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of these regions. For example, in Sierra Leone Mande speaking people, the “Mandingoes,” who were “Mohamedans,” were “as zealous promoters of their religion as even Mohamed himself could wish.” And even though their numbers were among the smallest, “[f]rom the middle of the sixteenth century through the seventeenth century, the region’s principal sources for the slave trade was littoral, non-Muslim populations.”⁸⁶¹ One can but speculate that the non-Muslim population had succumbed to the domination of their Islamic neighbors, who captured and sold them. They were all black Africans. Just as Eden had described. “These wars do not appear to have been waged for territorial expansion.” It would appear that,

slaves were used in the domestic economy to increase the ruler’s personal income, and perhaps this in itself can explain the propensity for wars that did not increase wealth by the annexation of territory but by the annexation and transport of people”
Sometimes the slaves of war were sold, and sometimes they were put to work by the victors in their ‘home territory’.⁸⁶²

In the region of present-day Guinea, can be found another example of strife between the original inhabitants of the land and the arrival of converted Muslims, viewed as interlopers. In the highlands of the Futa Jallon massif, the native Jallonke and Fulbe Muslims from Massina co-habited in strife from in the fifteenth century onward. Things broke into an extreme crisis in the seventeenth century with the fanatical Fulbe launching a documented fierce holy war (jihad) against the Jaloonke. “As a consequence numbers of the captive were sold along the coast into the transatlantic slave trade,” again one can only surmise the warring occurred at, perhaps, a less frenzied pitch in the preceding years. Furthermore “jihad” was not one, long uninterrupted Muslim march to victory. Non-Muslim populations fought back.⁸⁶³

When Othello speaks “Of being taken by the insolent foe / And sold to slavery” (1.3.128-170), what might that experience have been like?

The trade in slaves across the Sahara was probably next in importance to the gold trade for the western Sudan, but not for the central Sudan. There, because there was no gold, slaves were the mainstay of the export commerce. The Muslim world had a constant demand for black slaves that continued throughout our period and kept up long after 1500; it maintained its volume even during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The black slaves, if they survived the desert crossing, were spread out through the Maghrib, where many remained. Others were sent on to other Muslim lands. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, some black slaves reached the Christian regions of the Mediterranean ... Whatever the final destinations, the sufferings of those who were forced to make the trek were horrifying. In addition to the heat and cold, the threat of storms, and lack of water that they shared with the other members of the caravan, the slaves at times had to act as bearers of other goods; even when they did not carry the load, they had to load and unload the camels and help with the camp preparations. The conditions they endured approach those faced by other Africans on the Middle Passage to the Americas.⁸⁶⁴

“Physical prowess was one of the few accomplishments of black Africans that was valued, and African were employed in Europe in a range of physical activities.” Among them those of a “military bent”, their “[m]artial skills would have found favor in Renaissance Europe, where it was believed that a gentleman should possess the ‘manly ‘virtues manifested by skill at arms.” There is an entry, among the “list of employees at the Medici court in 1553,” that “reads: ‘Grazzico of Africa, called IL Moretto (the little Moor), horseman, page to the knight Prospero.’” There is evidence that “[p]eople of African descent also found employment as soldiers in various armies (for instance, there was a black captain in the 1520’s or 1530’s involved in a court case in Treviso, who may have been fighting with the imperial troops).” There were black body guards; (“a good example is Bastião/bastiano, the black African slave brought from Portugal to Italy in the household of the young Cardinal Jaime of Portugal, sold after Jaime’s death to the Portuguese bishop of Silves, Álvaro Afonso, and later ordered to stand guard over his former master’s tomb in the church of S. Miniato al

Monte outside of Florence)”⁸⁶⁵ Any of these historical figures provide clues as to what might have been Othello’s road to Venice (on such military figures see a 15th Century painting, fig. 93, fig. 94, fig. 95).

“Italians mainly imported their slaves from outside. Already by the twelfth century, Venice had a slave population that was recruited for a wide are, though it was a small percentage of the total Venetian population.” By “the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, slaves in Italy came from a number of areas and ethnic groups.” These groups included “Muslims, Tatars, Circassians, Russians, Bulgarians, Armenians, Albanians, a few from the islands of the Mediterranean, and fewer still from black Africa and the Canaries.” For the most part, they were women “used as domestics or concubines.” There were slaves throughout Renaissance Italy, but “slavery was never crucial for social or economic development,” unlike in Roman times.⁸⁶⁶

Clearly, there was a possible – if not unusual – pathway for black Othello, once a slave, to become a general in service to the Republic of Venice.

Venice, Its Origins

Venice is a mythic construct – a muse of our imaginary, as much as she is real. And like all women with the allure to evoke strong feelings she has been both valorized and demonized: the chaste virgin, the nurturing mother – the corrupting whore.

If one thing defines Venice, it is that she is a place of incredible contrasts.

Like Venus, Venice was born from the sea. But unlike Venus, who was born nubile, fully formed in grace and beauty,⁸⁶⁷ Venice’s watery natal origins were neither so auspicious

nor preordained. Venice had to earn her vaunted place in history and wrest her magnificence from the clutches of the sea.

What became a state, a city-state, the most Serene Republic of Venice, *La Serenissima*, grew from lagoon communities formed in Northeastern Italy during the fifth century C.E. by outlying Roman citizens seeking protection from barbarian raiders as the empire crumbled. These early settlers fleeing the Goths found refuge among the native Veneti on an archipelago of long sandy islands (or *lidi*) amid marshland created from the silt of Alpine snowmelts in an enclosed bay off the Adriatic Sea.⁸⁶⁸ From these humble beginnings, over time, a great city was ingeniously engineered over water. And Venice, against all odds, became a major maritime power in the tenth century. During the Renaissance, the city experienced her Golden Age as she attained unprecedented heights of wealth, sovereignty and conquest as a ruling empire of the sea.⁸⁶⁹

Through famine, fire, floods and plagues, all the glory that would redound to Venice, came first and foremost from her impressive dominance of foreign trade.⁸⁷⁰ In large part, her success emerged from the expedient manner in which she tied the exigencies of defense to commerce. Venice's massive warships were built oversize in the shipyards of the *Arsenale* with extra storage capacity to return from battle with room for cargo. Her merchant fleet was kitted out for combat. The interest of the political elite lay with the merchants because they were one in the same.⁸⁷¹

Venice thrived as a maritime power uniquely ruled by a hereditary aristocratic oligarchy of merchants with an elected leader from among their own. The collectively appointed-one, who served for life, they called *il doge* – the duke. However, as a collectively ruling body, the lords of trade kept their nominal sovereign's power in check.

This unusual structure of democratic governance was a response to certain unavoidable realities. Without the capacity to amass land out among the marshes, there was no way to impose a feudal system of propertied peers with wealth tied to estates. Without land and serfs attached to the land, there could be no clear hereditary social divisions. Without crops harvested from the land, barter could not run the economy. Hence, Venice became a republic of free citizens. And money, which could only to be amassed in Venice through trade, reigned supreme. As such, it was money accrued through commerce that conveyed or purchased political power and privilege: a constitutional schema distinctive to Venice, “a birthplace of modern capitalism,” which would last the course of an age.⁸⁷²

Until this 1000-year-old independent Republic was vanquished by Napoleon Bonaparte in the waning years of the eighteenth century, Venice captured the fancy of the world as one of the most democratic, and surely the most sophisticated and charismatic idyll, among all European cultures. Right up to her ignominious fall at the hands of the Corsican-born conqueror Venice commanded a status unto herself as the cosmopolitan threshold between West and East.

To achieve this stature Venetians stuck to business. Following profit above all else, they did not concern themselves with currying favor or making unilateral alliances. Although, Latin Catholics, they did business with the Christian world and Muslim Byzantium with equal relish, always dancing on the edge between papal censure, danger and opportunity.⁸⁷³

It was just such equivocation, a misplaced gamble, an unwillingness to ally herself with the French Emperor but rather to hedge her bets as a neutral party in France’s war with Austria that brought about Venice’s Waterloo.⁸⁷⁴ Just why Venice sat so long on the fence in declaring sides rather than rescue herself from Napoleon’s aggression through an alliance

with the invader comes less from a mistake in conscious strategy than from what historian of Venice John Julius Norwich calls a lack of will: “she was old and tired and she was also spoilt.” Did Venice, he wonders, have “a death wish?” “If so, it was to be granted sooner than she knew.”⁸⁷⁵ The doomed Republic died of inertia, Sunday, June 4, 1797. For the first time in her illustrious history, Venice was under foreign rule.⁸⁷⁶

Storied Venice

Since 1987 a UNESCO Heritage Site, a veritable *plein air* museum on the edge of its famous lagoon. Grand Tour Venice is a faded but still beautiful icon of its former grandeur. As seen from our 21st century perspective very little has changed in the appearance of Venice’s cityscape from centuries past.⁸⁷⁷ We know this because the Venetian view has been captured over several hundred years like no other capital by some of the greatest artists ever known: Giorgione, Gentile Bellini, Carpaccio, Tintoretto, Francesco Guardi, Bassano, Turner, Carlo Brancaccio, John Singer Sargent, Monet, and of course the prolific, eighteenth-century, signature painter of panoramic Venetian vistas, Canaletto (fig. 96).⁸⁷⁸

Now disbursed in public collections all over the world, we can see in celebrated painting after celebrated painting that the facades of Venice’s familiar landmarks (a testament to some of the greatest architecture ever produced) look today much as they did in Shakespeare’s day. And the city’s contemporary footprint is still the one first formed so many years ago by a labyrinth of islands intersected by an extensive matrix of canals that morphically appears to float, shimmering mirage-like, on the lagoon.

Venice is an enduring architectural masterpiece; it retains the physical aspect it

acquired in the Middle Ages and Renaissance because its six square mile borders and network of transportation are still dictated by the water that surrounds it and the canals that run through it. It is a consequence of this extraordinary geography that Venice is singular among European urban centers in its total preservation of its authentic past, devoid as it is of the presence of not only modern structures, but also cars, trams and buses. Until you go there it is hard to believe that after many hundreds of years Venice still remains navigable only by foot or boat: water taxis, public watercraft (*vaporetti*) and, of course, its famous fleet of gondolas.

At present there are some four hundred officially licensed gondoliers who ply their trade, ferrying tourists through the intricate crisscross of Venice's canals. This celebrated system of transit, anchored by the Grand Canal (fig. 96), flows under ancient pedestrian bridges – the ever-bustling, market-centered Rialto, the city's commercial hub, and the legendary Bridge of Sighs among them. It is this site-centric romanticism, sweetened by tales Casanova and *carnival*, of Venice's past glory and its high-spirited even decadent revelry, which lures the tourists: 18 million visitors come every year to this small city of 100,000 natives, who still live within the boundaries of the historic *sestieri*.⁸⁷⁹ For Shakespeare-lovers, the story of Othello and Desdemona adds to the romance.

Through its fate as a living museum Venice has attained unrivalled status as one of the great destinations of cultural tourism. The question is for how long? Venice is a city burdened by the limits of its structural engineering, sinking incrementally deeper and deeper into the abyss, while at the same time ocean levels, alarmingly on the rise due to global warming, create the *acqua alta* that now regularly floods the city.⁸⁸⁰ Is it possible that someday all we will have as physical reminders of what once was this glorious historical landmark are the Venetian Resort and Casinos in Las Vegas and Macau and the Venice Water Town near

Hangzhou, China? Unimaginable.

I, like so many, love Venice. It is to me the most beautiful city in the world. But that does not mean that Venice has a pristine past.

A Tour Through Place and Past in Othello's City

The signature panorama of Piazza San Marco (fig. 1) as you approach by boat from across the lagoon is where most of the action that takes place in the Venice scenes of Shakespeare's *Othello* occur. It is also a repository for the spoils of hundreds of years of thievery, plunder and warfare.

Within the massive dome of the Byzantine-inflected *Basilica Patriarcale Cattedrale di San Marco* or St. Mark's Basilica, which gives the square its name, the city's greatest treasure, the pilfered remains of the apostle, Mark the Evangelist, allegedly lie interred. Legend has it that in 828 C.E. two daring Venetian merchants stole St. Mark's body from its resting place in the North African city of Alexandria. By hiding the body under slabs of pork, the grave robbers were able to thoroughly repulse the local Muslim port inspectors, who, in their disgust, waved them through customs. And thus, amidst much local fanfare, Saint Mark was brought to Venice.

In 832 C.E., four years after the brazen abduction of the bones, the first iteration of the church of San Marco was erected to honor the city's now patron saint. The harboring of the Saint's Mark's relics was more than a community moral-builder; it endowed Venice with Apostolic patronage, placing her on a spiritual level second only to Rome. For this, Venice claimed an unprecedented ecclesiastical autonomy from the pope, which it used to great

political advantage to build beyond its shallow lagoon and sandy barrier islands⁸⁸¹ its rapacious and influential overseas empire.⁸⁸²

St. Mark's Basilica began to take its magnificent form in the late eleventh century. It was the third church on the original site at the eastern end of the piazza and was destined to be one of the most grand and massive houses of worship in the West.⁸⁸³ Nonetheless, the basilica was still only designed to be the private chapel of the doge, and would remain attached to the ducal palace, which houses the duke's private chambers as well as serving as the seat of government. The palace in its present form, an opulent, rose-colored stone Renaissance masterpiece with its crenellated, wedding cake Gothic tracery, which in scale even does eclipse the church,

As you look up at St. Mark's, you will see four massive bronze horses (the Triumphal Quadriga) bestride the loggia of the Basilica. They tell an important story of pillage all their own.

Ask anyone who keeps up with their history and they will tell you that the Fall of Constantinople, the seat of the Byzantine Empire, took place in 1453 when the Ottomans successfully laid siege to the city (fig. 97, fig. 98). It was a crushing defeat for all of Christendom because it marked the end, after having endured for one thousand years, of any kind of Christian presence in the lands of the Middle East. Now there would be nothing to protect Europe's eastern flank from the Turks.

What is not generally understood is that Byzantium had been dealt a blow two hundred years earlier by a siege that brought it to its knees and all but insured its inevitable demise. And that blow had been at the hands of the Republic of Venice.

The Fourth Crusade (1202-04), like all European Crusades of the Middle Ages, was designed to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim control. However, en route to the Holy Lands the Venetians were persuaded to get involved in a dynastic dispute for a considerable fee that would restore the deposed and so-called rightful emperor to the Byzantine throne to reign alongside his son, Alexius Angelos.

Late in June of 1203, the Venetian fleet showed up in the currents of the Bosphorus just outside the walls of Constantinople, and after some fighting, as planned, the son and father duo was installed. It was not long, however, before the citizenry responded in a popular uprising against the new rulers. A complication of this civil unrest was that the funds to pay the Venetians were not forthcoming.

With the murder of Alexius IV, the Venetians made the fateful and self-serving decision to sack Constantinople and re-anoint the city as the capitol of a new Latin or Roman Catholic Empire. The expedition that had begun for the Venetians as a war against Islam had now become an internecine schismatic battle within the greater Christian community with one sect of Christendom fighting another. Motivated by what can only be called out and out greed, it was an assault prosecuted with nauseating brutality.

The Venetian attack was so thorough and cold-blooded that some have speculated that Constantinople had always been the target.

In the piazza an ancient bronze sculpture of the winged Lion of the Apocrypha, of Venice (spoils from another campaign), symbolizing the saint, is mounted high atop a column of granite where it has stood since the thirteenth century. The column with the winged Lion and the arcades of the imposing Doge Palace adorned with the horses pillaged from the

hippodrome of Constantinople. With San Marco, these visual signs define Venice – and have so for hundreds of years.

Venice in the Age of Shakespeare

A devoutly Catholic city whose identity and civic rituals were imbued with religious symbols and myths, Venice was proudly and sometimes defiantly independent of Rome... It did not hesitate to host and tolerate communities of Protestants, Jews, heretics and even fierce enemies and rivals, the Turks."

– Shaul Bassi and Laura Tossi, eds., *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (2011)⁸⁸⁴

But Venice was also the site of disorder and licentiousness – not the least of which for the Protestant English was a result of Venice's Catholicity – in all meanings of the word. The whore of Venice. Venice as whore. These tropes that appear in *Othello* are also part of Venice's image in the zeitgeist of early modern Europe.

Why Venice? And what effect did setting the play in Venice have on Shakespeare's audience? Some see Venice vested in its role as the outpost of Christendom and mercantile might as an aspirational site for Londoners. However, embedded in this Crown Jewel of European Christian civilization is to be found the unsettling influence of a Muslim and Jewish presence. As a black commander sent to fight the Turks Othello is an unorthodox champion. In its flavor of early modern multiculturalism Venice serves as perfect environment within which Shakespeare can explore the issues of race and Otherness in all their complexities. Topics that still resonate.

Venice in Othello's world was ruled by a *doge* or duke: a peer elected for life from among the body of male members of the ruling Venetian class, the *patriciate*. Everything of government in Venice is about fathers and power.

From the thirteenth century on, patrilineal descent held special significance in Venetian society because it was through the male line and the male line only that a member of the patriciate qualified for class membership. Hence the entire social and political system was predicated upon a strong sense of lineage and preferential family groups, which could not be added to. It was marriage that created strong bonds between the families, however, and influenced widespread social networks.⁸⁸⁵

What was the culture, the social ideas, surrounding the understanding of female behavior in early modern Venice?

Patrician mothers' bonds were quite complex because they would incorporate allegiances with their both their father's family, their natal family and their husband's or marital family.⁸⁸⁶ By the fifteenth century there was a thick web of ties throughout the patriciate based on bilateral kinship orientation and the great care families took in their marriage strategies and mother's lineage came to weigh as a factor in determining social status.⁸⁸⁷ This is certainly understandable because the political franchise of Venetian noble families was entirely based on their hereditary membership in the Great Council, which gave the patriciate its underlying foundational political coherence as a ruling social caste.⁸⁸⁸

Desdemona was by birth a noblewoman, a daughter of the patriciate. Her father is senator. As actors in the Venetian urban experience, women of the upper ranks were encumbered with family obligations and responsibilities of filial and wifely obedience to their fathers and husbands in a strictly ordered, patriarchal world that was designed to protect the

good of the collective family unit. Elite Venetian woman, like Desdemona, were known for their piety and humility, their domesticity, their duty, and their chastity. Yet, paradoxically, these so-ordained vessels of female purity lived in a society increasingly branded by promiscuity. Because even as Venice's noble daughters were locked up safely in the near cloister-like home imprisonment of domestic husbandry running their households, her patrician sons became infamous for their indolence, dissoluteness and debauchery out of the town. An undercurrent of loose sexual mores and the pursuit of pleasure by its men among a growing underclass of prostitutes and courtesans, who may have in the middle of the sixteenth century constituted more than ten per cent of the city's. A double standard for women to say the least, on so many levels.

For all the exclusivity and insularity among its ruling class, Venice in the sixteenth century was a diverse urban center of roughly 150,000 inhabitants, a population swelled by immigrants drawn from the nearby towns, the countryside and abroad. Uniquely, Venice was what Blake de Maria calls a *convivencia* a place in time when "Jews, Christians, and Muslims – the People of the Book – did not merely live side by side but rather among each other."⁸⁸⁹ Venice was the true inheritor of the pre-Inquisition Iberian Peninsula that after 1492 cast it Jewish and Muslim populations out of its borders.

As a maritime hub, the City State of Venice was arguably not only the most religiously but also the most ethnically and racially diverse metropolis of the time.⁸⁹⁰ The proximity of Venice to the sea and the great advantage it has taken to create the communication and commercial connections it has with faraway lands is what has made the city such a potent vector of culture. This is just the unique environment to have produced an Othello.

The fabulously wealthy flocked to Venice, and although merchants were denied noble status and participation in the political life of the city, it was these merchants who made considerable contributions to the life and culture of their beloved city through cultural patronage and civic involvement, many rewarded with the status of naturalized citizen or *cittadino* families.⁸⁹¹ The exception of course are the Jews, who are both necessary as money lenders, like Shakespeare's Shylock in a Christian society built on trade that prohibits member of its sect to participate in usury. Without the Jews, there would be not capital to support the trade that was the lifeblood of Renaissance Venice. Deemed, *aliens*, they are denied the right to participate at all in civic life, forced to live apart confined to a ghetto, which, come nightfall, they are literally locked within. It is Shylock who calls out the Venetian Christians for their hypocrisy in owning slaves when they would deny him rightful ownership of Antonio's pound of flesh, which he has legally, if grossly, purchased.

SHYLOCK. *You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
Which (like your asses, and your dogs and mules)
You use in abject and in slavish parts,
Because you bought them, — shall I say to you,
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
Why sweat they under burthens? let their beds
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
Be season'd with such viands? you will answer 'The slaves are ours,'
— so do I answer you:
The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought, 'tis mine and I will have it:
If you deny me, fie upon your law! (IV.i.90–100)*

Venice had a ubiquitous African presence. The incongruity of the juxtaposition of

Othello in his position of high esteem as an elite black African among the black slaves of the city, which was the customary profile of slaves is just a fascinating proposition. Hard not to believe that Shakespeare did not know personally the city of Venice with all its multicultural ramifications as the backdrop to a play about interracial marriage. And beyond the world of the play in *Othello* it is quite revealing to have Shylock evoke the marriage between slaves and masters as the most undesirable condition imaginable. Was it a class issue? Or race issue? I would say both. But in the case of Othello and Desdemona, Othello's elite status clearly mitigates race – at least for some. But it speaks to just how much more fluid society was in the early modern world than we often imagine when we think of Africans in Europe only as slaves, when in fact they reached across all sections of society.

In the play Desdemona is brought to meet Othello at the outset of her elopement by “a knave of common hire, a gondolier.” Which is all the more resonant when you consider that in 1494 Vittore Carpaccio, puts a black gondolier (fig. 8, fig. 9) in the foreground of his 3.7 x 3.9 m. canvas of a scene on the Grand Canal, *Miracle of the True Cross: The Healing of the Possessed Boy*, which hangs in the The Gallerie dell'Accademia, in Venice today. If you visit The Getty Museum in Los Angeles you can see a very fine smaller painting of Carpaccio's featuring two black gondoliers, *Hunting on the Lagoon* (fig. 100, fig. 101).

Shakespeare is so in tune with the city that it is hard not to imagine that he knew Venice first hand, but we have no evidence that he ever visited La Serenissima, but equally we have no evidence that he did not.

Portrait of a Marriage

Othello's life in Venice as we know it is defined by his marriage to Desdemona, which explicitly foregrounds the early modern issue of romantic aspects of intercultural encounter and the response to miscegenation in his time. But in a reversal of convention, the playwright depicts the affinity, not the social distance, between Othello the African other and Desdemona the white gentlewoman. He presents the nuances of the fluidity of race and gender in early modern Europe for an elite, cultured black man and a spirited Venetian lady when there is propinquity in the nature of their psyches. Even irrespective of race, as lovers, Othello and Desdemona are not normative representations of masculinity and femininity for their time. Desdemona loves Othello out of compassion for the brutality of his life, for the dangers he has passed, and Othello loves Desdemona for the compassion she feels for his suffering. Their relationship, grounded in feelings of empathy, strikingly foreshadows the modern. The tragedy is that all this is destroyed by outside forces of racial animus – embodied in Iago – working against the couple. Iago is a study in how racial ideology infects the psyche, the imagination, and the conduct of the insecure and threatened white man. Othello and Desdemona are buffeted by the forces of both racism and sexism.

In the context of proscribed appropriate female behavior, the very act of Desdemona stepping outside the appropriate boundaries of her domestic sphere and travelling to Othello unaccompanied in the care of a gondolier is certainly enough of a reason to provoke censure in her culture. It is an act of independence glaring in its audacity, to be interpreted as a warning sign to male authority that this woman, who not only defies what she clearly

understands to be her father's wishes but exhibits behavior that boldly transgresses her gender role, is trouble indeed. At every turn, through acts of personal agency, poor Desdemona, rather than liberating herself, at each turn sets herself up for a tragic end at the hand of a man. For it is Othello's "excuse" that he is protecting all men from this transgressing female that gives him the justification, in his view, to act as both judge and executioner. Poor Desdemona, she thought Othello was a different kind of man than the patriarchs of her time.

Begin Side note:

I see a pattern unfolding here. Just one more injustice to add to the collection of ironies we encounter in this study. Othello is too noble of character to be a black man. Shakespeare is too lowly born and uneducated to be a literary genius. Desdemona has too much agency as a woman not to be at fault, irrespective of whether or not she has committed any particular transgression. And there you have it: a trifecta of tyrannies attending race, class, and gender.

Victims, yes, but victims of attitudes governing circumstance – not just circumstances.

End Side Note.

Here is what we know of Renaissance attitudes to sexuality and sexual behavior. It was the female sex who was believed to have an ungovernable sexual appetite. Then conventional wisdom, so opposite to what evolved over time, would have it that, by nature, women were sexually voracious and therefore had to be scrupulously checked in their inclinations and policed in their behavior. Hence women who could be physically governed in daily life, the wealthy who did not need to earn their living, were literally shut away to control the product of their sexually selves – reproduction. Controlling paternity and the rights of primogeniture – legal property transfer through the male line – made the dominance of women to be deemed an absolute necessity.

Consequently, it was dominance that became synonymous with what it meant to be male – with patriarchy as institutionalized male dominance in Renaissance Venice. Any hint of passivity was the greatest risk to a man. Male impotence was so great a deficit that failure to achieve an erection was the only legitimate grounds for the annulment of a marriage. And even homosexual behavior was judged as a transgression of dominance rather than deviant desire. It was only the man in the passive role in a consenting sex act who was censored – not the dominant male. And that censure did not criminalize the “sodomite’s” behavior it rendered him literally out of his senses in the public view for adopting improper “female” conduct. For such a lapse these men were sent to (“la pazzaria”) a home for the insane.⁸⁹²

Whereas male artisans and workers might move up the social ladder, women and stayed in the lower economic ranks of Venice’s denizens, increasingly the numbers of girls and women who dictated by dire necessity had only the sale of their sexual services to fall back on in order to subsist in a city where upward mobility through marriage was mostly closed to them and not everyone could be accommodated in the homes of the more affluent as domestic servants.⁸⁹³

We know further from the work of Stanley Chothat that changes in laws creating social registries that proved family pedigree and the fixing of dowry prices had the unintended consequences of altering the status of Venetian noblewomen in the sixteenth century. The marriage age for both men and women rose during the previous century. With this bride price increase Some lesser sons could not be provided for. With the bride price higher women grew to have a greater choice over their marriage status. They might choose to go into a convent rather than marry or perhaps – unlikely as it seems to us today, remain unattached. This easily could have been the route that Desdemona was heading down in her denial of so many

suitable suitors. As her father's only child, and daughter, she may have been looking to avoid the subordination to a husband that marriage would require of her. It makes her choice of Othello all the more intentional when matrimony was not inevitable.

Desdemona's free and spirited nature seems to pose an issue for Othello after they are married. Iago points out that Desdemona is acting with a degree of independence and forcefulness unusual to her sex. "Our general wife is now the general," speaks to what is perceived to be and inappropriate gender reversal. And Othello speaks of having given up "his unhoused free condition" to the "fair warrior" who has won his heart. There is no question that as he comes to doubt Desdemona's faithfulness to his bed he is plagued by the feelings of emasculation it causes in him. Her boldness and personal confidence, uncommon female behavior have predisposed Othello to mistrust his wife.

To equate female sexuality with disobedience and pollution and judge women exclusively on the basis of their sexual conduct is a cornerstone of Judeo-Christian Tradition, a structural and thus indelible doctrine; it is an apologia for misogyny.

– Kathryn Harrison, *Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured*.

CHAPTER TEN: CYPRUS AND THE TURKS

CYPRUS and THE TURKS

CYPRUS Island of Aphrodite

Cyprus

Susan Solt: Journal Entry

September 21, 2014, Larnaca: 7:30 p.m. local time.

As my taxi whisks me away from the Arrivals Terminal into the night, “WELCOME TO CYPRUS” reads the greeting outside Larnaca Airport in big red illuminated block letters. In the top left hand corner of the sign I then notice in letterforms 1/5th the size of the main message the word “Vodafone” (also in red). An advertising opportunity *par excellence* for the ubiquitous wireless carrier whose name I notice is also intermittently appearing on my iPhone. During post flight power-up this communications giant fights in a rather mad search among several carriers for dominance of my device until it beats out the competition. Vodafone’s hegemony will not last throughout my 5-day stay, however, as I cross back and forth between the independent Cypriot South and Turkish Northern Cyprus in my search to find Othello in the Venetian military outposts of the island’s sixteenth century past.

No conquest of Cyprus has ever lasted so Vodafone is the most recent hegemon among many. I cannot help but see the scramble for power on my cell phone throughout my stay in this arid, sun-drenched, beautiful island – third in size after Sicily and Crete in all the expanse of the Mediterranean – as a metaphor for the quixotic fate of this this contested, piece of earth in the farthest reaches of the Eastern borders of Homer’s wine-dark sea. Cyprus, always a pawn for the next taker is at the cusp of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa (fig. 102). But as the Birthplace of Aphrodite “Kypris” – this, her isle, is culturally and linguistically Greek. The Myceneans were among the first and most numerous Greeks to arrive in 1500 B.C.E. The lasting influence of Greece on the people through thousands of years of history ever since is quite stunning.

First people, Neolithic era in Cyprus in ninth century B.C.E.

The Romans claimed their ownership of Cyprus from 30 B.C.E. until 336 C.E (fig. 103, fig. 104). Early in the Roman Era the Apostles Paul and Baranabas came to Cyprus in 45 C.E. The story goes that they came to visit Lazarus, Jesus' friend, who had found a home in exile in Larnaca.

Yes, I have read the guidebooks.

And although it's not part of my Othello tour I will for sure visit the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Lazarus (fig. 105), where the resurrected saint is supposedly (re) interred.

I have arrived on Cyprus right in the middle of US and coalition plans on dropping bombs on Syria just off the eastern coast of the island as the people of Cyprus go about their business seemingly unperturbed on both sides of the Turkish/Greek national divide. No change in world events will seemingly change their fate as forever divided – so what does it matter to them. They see American as going the way of the Roman Empire, squandering their control of the world as evidenced in the ruins of the Roman town of Salamis, which I will visit in Northern Cyprus.

Rome, just one among many conquerors.

Cyprus has been a pawn in world geopolitics for hundreds even thousands of years (fig. 106). But as I muse on the sign at the airport welcoming me, what runs through my head are Othello's words to Ludovico, the Venetian envoy. Ludovico arrives from Venice in the midst of The Moor's "breakdown" over his new bride Desdemona's putative betrayal. Othello's words, are also a betrayal. A betrayal that something is not right:

You are welcome, Sir, to Cyprus. Goats and monkeys!

It is a rude remark. Not befitting the commanding general of the Venetian forces in Cyprus.

I arrive at the Palm Beach Hotel and Bungalows near Larnaca. It is perfect.
My room faces the ocean.

I am here for these few days to look for Othello in the built remains of the Venetian conquest of this troubled island nation that lives in both lore and history. I will have two professional guides, Alexia and Egon, and I will have William Dreghorn.

Bill Dreghorn was senior lecturer in geology in Bristol when he decided on an early retirement in order to research geology in Cyprus. He moved here in 1968 and lived in Kyrenia, later in Famagusta where he also died in 2001. He is known for his many books [on Cyprus] and his simple and detailed descriptions not only in geology but in archaeology as well.

I have his *Famagusta & Salamis. A Guide Book* with me, which I purchased on Amazon U.K.

I have one full day, my first day scheduled for Famagusta because as Bill (yes, I call him Bill) says, “One full day spent in Famagusta will reveal the history of Cyprus in a nutshell.”

Just what I need to reveal Othello’s history there.

September 22, 2014, Larnaca: 10:30 p.m. local time.

Day 1: Guide Alexia

Bring passport for checkpoint into Turkish Cyprus.

September 22, 2014, Famagusta.

Breakfast at the Dezdimona Café.

A Brief History of Famagusta, the Venetian military outpost (fig. 107) where Othello is stationed, based on William Dreghorn:

Much of the history of the town is obscure as there are no written records and our only source of material is from travellers' accounts of merchants passing through. Some historians declare that it was founded by King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt in 285 B.C. By the year 1300 A.D. the town was one of the principal markets of the Eastern Mediterranean, the rendezvous of rich merchants and the headquarters of many Christian religious orders as revealed by numerous churches of various denominations still to be seen in the town today. This was the time of the Crusades and when the rich Lusignan family ruled Cyprus, and hence the period 1200 to 1489 in Cyprus history is called the Lusignan dynasty. Famagusta was protected by ramparts which encircle the town and the citadel...

This fact stood out to me because it involved the English. In 1191 A.D. King Richard the Lion Heart defeated Isaac Comnenus on his way to the Crusades and conquered Cyprus. But he couldn't hang on to it.

The period 1300 to 1400 is known as the golden age of Famagusta and was regarded as such by visiting merchants, who brought back tales of fabulous wealth in the various places. After 1400, rival factions of Genoese and Venetian merchants settled there. The Genoese caused much strife until finally the Venetians took command of all Cyprus and transferred the capital from Nicosia to Famagusta in 1489... (fig. 108).

The Venetians were in command for 82 years and it was from Famagusta that the whole island was governed.

This is the time of Othello. And although there were threats from the Turks, just like in the play, the loss of Famagusta to the Ottoman Empire did not come until 1571 (fig. 109).

The Turkish armada arrived outside the town in 1570 and put it under siege for a year. In 1571 not only Famagusta, but all Cyprus was under Turkish rule and remained so until 1878. The end of colonial rule in 1960 led to the intensification of intercommunal strife between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots which concluded in 1974 with Turkish Cypriot rule in North Cyprus.

Act 3, Scene 2 of *Othello* Opens with Othello and Iago in conversation. Othello instructs Iago, "These letters give, Iago, to the pilot; / And by him do my duties to the senate." Iago is to give these letters to the captain of the ship who brought him from Venice to Cyprus to let the senate, and the Duke know that the Turkish fleet has been destroyed in a freakish storm, and that all is well. Othello tells Iago that his next action will be "walking on the works," that is walking on the city's fortifications – the walls built to encase the city and protect it from enemy armies and foreign fleets.

Although common wisdom says that Shakespeare has never been to Famagusta, the physical layout of the city is uncannily like everything he describes. And as you climb the stairs (fig. 110) and walk the city walls (fig. 111) high above the harbor the view is much the same as it would have been in the sixteenth century.

Steps lead up to the embattlements where there is a fine view of both ancient and modern harbours. Modern ships still use the same harbour entrance as it was in the golden age of Famagusta, 1300 to 1400 A.D. In those times harbours were defended by a huge iron chain slung across the water, and just by the entrance, and opposite the Citadel, can be seen a clump of rocks on a promontory where there was the chain tower. The chain was lowered into the water when enemy ships were in the offing. The other harbour in Cyprus. Girne, was also defended by chain and there the chain tower still stands in the middle of the modern harbour.

The most famous part of the walls surrounding the city of Famagusta has to be the Citadel, commonly referred to as Othello's Castle (fig. 112). In Shakespeare's play, Othello is sent to Cyprus, where "The fortitude of the place is well known to you." And here we see it. Also, from this we must assume he has been to Cyprus before his marriage to Desdemona. From Act II onwards, the play is simply set in 'A seaport in Cyprus' and also in 'A hall in the castle'. The castle is referred to today as Othello's Tower (fig. 113). It is not so much a tower as a castle in its own right, within the fortress walls of the city of Famagusta.

Othello's tower is the medieval fortress or citadel guarding both harbour and town. The

entrance to the Tower is pierced through the Venetian fortifications which date from between 1500 and 1550. Above the gateway is a marble slab on which is sculptured the badge of Venice, a winged lion, so frequently seen in other parts of Cyprus such as Girne Castle, Nicosia, and Bellapais Abbey.

The Winged Lion tells the visitor that the Venetians were here. It is the Lion of Saint Mark (fig. 114), representing the evangelist saint, figured as a winged lion holding a Bible. The winged lion is the symbol of the city of Venice and formerly of the Republic of Venice. Most famously, one of its kind it stands high on a column above Saint Mark's square.

Inside the Walls there is the Great Hall, and with the large kitchen at one end, it is presumed that this was the refectory or dining hall. It dates from about 1300 and is massively constructed with a vaulted roof supported by tall Gothic arches. How can such a gloomy place be called a palace? More like a prison. Windows were usually very small for defense purposes and no glass was used, pieces of cloth or carpets kept out wind and rain. However, in those times it could be a quite a "comfy" place with fine tapestries on the wall and huge fires blazing away at one end, where the whole carcass of a moufflon could be roasted. Not far outside the town there is the vast interior plain of Cyprus known as the Mesarya and here the nobles went hunting.

On site, it is certainly not hard to imagine the drama of *Othello* unfolding.

The other structure in this small coastal town, which is of great interest, which survives from Famagusta's Venetian period is St Nicolas Cathedral (fig. 115). The cathedral predates the Venetian and was built during the Lusignan rule. As we are in the Turkish part of Cyprus the cathedral is now, of course a mosque, which it has been since the sixteenth century when the Ottoman Empire conquered the Island and a Minaret was added. While in the town I heard the Muslim call to prayer for the first time in my life.

St. Nicholas Cathedral (Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque)

The cathedral of St Nicholas is the largest medieval building in Famagusta and was commenced in 1300 A.D. It must be noted that the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages often took more than 100 years to complete, so possibly St Nicholas was completed about 1400. The Gothic style of architecture resembles closely the great cathedral of Rheims in France. Similarly St Sophia in Nicosia and Bellapais abbey all seem to be the work of French architects, and this is understandable when one realises that the kings of Cyprus from 1190 to 1489 were all of the French Lusignan family who, at least in their churches, 'Frenchified' Cyprus.

I was very pleased to find an old print of a view of the cathedral painted after its conversion to a mosque. I bought it off the wall of a shop selling memorabilia and nobody knew how long it had been there. The building as it is pictured is in semi-ruin. In these sites of historical memory, I am reminded of a time when the arts were central to the culture and to the culture of worship. God, Apollo and the muses, Allah. Up the road in the ruins of a Roman theater in Salamis – just a single headless one is left lying in the middle of what would have been the stage.

When you tour Famagusta. You learn that Cyprus has its own Othello origins myth.

Of course, Shakespeare never visited Cyprus, my guide and people in Famagusta are quick to point out, but perhaps he heard the story of Sir Cristoforo Moro, a lieutenant governor of Cyprus from 1506-1508, they offer. It is said that Sir Cristoforo's, young wife died on the voyage back from Cyprus. Some say under suspicious circumstances. Apparently, Sir Cristoforo was not a Moor, but his surname may have suggested otherwise. The locals are convinced his name fueled Shakespeare imagination.⁸⁹⁴

I wonder why people do not think Sir Cristoforo Moro was a Moor when the author of Shakespeare's source for *Othello* clearly did. In Cinthio's "Disdemona and the Moor," published in Italian in 1565 as part of *Gli Hecatommithi*, he is clearly based on Sir Cristoforo and his wife.

“Moro” in Italian means “blackamoor” in English to John Florio the great linguist and lexicographer who was a London contemporary Shakespeare’s. He made this very clear in his "A World of Words (a 1598 Italian/English Dictionary)". A fact which is seared into my memory for its importance to my research on Othello.

The Venetian redoubt of Famagusta was lost to the Ottomans in 1570 A.D., without resistance. It remained in Ottoman hands for about three centuries – until the British colonial period. It then went through its modern contested history with civil war its own tragic scene. In 1974 the Turks used the takeover of the Greek government by a coup of the the military junta as a license to invade take over 37% of Cyprus in supposedly preemptive move. Cyprus has been divided ever since.

September 23, 2014, Cyprus: 9:30 p.m. local time.

The day after my day in Famagusta, I watched the BBC News in London confirm 14 air strikes against Isis in Syria. Included in the report were the details that the coalition led by the United States had launched their sorties from Cyprus where the jets were on alert. Turkey talked of joining the coalition, but not as a military partner.

According to my international phone plan with ATT, Cyprus, which joined the EU in 2004, is not included in my “Europe” plan, but Turkey is...

The Turks

'Turks' and 'Moors' in Shakespeare's Othello

Michael Neill in his article, “‘Mulattos,’ ‘Blacks,’ and ‘Indian Moors:’ Othello and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference,” puts his finger on a critical point about racial consciousness in early modern England. The English developed a taxonomy of human difference based upon race only *after* their encounter with racial “others.” It was not until the sixteenth century that classifications based on race began to materialize, however, they came into being directly as a response to these interactions. Neill believes that “not to talk about [race in Othello] is to ignore something fundamental about a play that has rightly come to be identified as a foundational text in the emergence of modern European racial consciousness – a play that trades in constructions of human difference at once misleadingly *like* and confusingly *unlike* all those twentieth-century notions to which they are nevertheless recognizably ancestral.”⁸⁹⁵

“To pose these and other questions about the racial implications of any early modern text is also to inquire into how audiences (then and now) might have construed a recognized concept of ‘race’ as well as its social and cultural articulation” in [sixteenth and] seventeenth century England. So saying, Margo Hendricks, in her introduction to *Shakespeare and Race*, expresses her keen interest in the “epistemology of race” in the early modern period where the

usage of the word ‘race’ reveals a multiplicity of loci, of axes of determinism, as well as metaphorical systems to aid and abet its deployment across a variety of boundaries in the making. As an expression of fundamental distinctions, the meaning of race varied depending upon whether a writer wanted to specify difference born of a class-based group typology. Nonetheless, in all these variations, race is envisioned as something fundamental, something immutable, knowable and recognizable, yet we

only see it when its boundaries are violated, and thus race is also, paradoxically, mysterious, illusory and mutable.⁸⁹⁶

“All of this, perhaps, was well known to Shakespeare,”⁸⁹⁷ as early as 1613, Samuel Purchas, “when, in describing the divided condition of humankind,” “contrasted ‘the tawny Moore, black Negro, duskie Libyan, ash-colored Indian, oliue-colored American...with the whiter European.’”⁸⁹⁸

Henry Louis Gates Jr. maintains that, irrespective of a formalized nomenclature, “‘racism’ exists when one generalizes about the attributes of an individual (and treats him accordingly). Such generalizations are based upon a predetermined set of causes or effects thought to be shared a by all members of a physically defined group who are also assumed to share certain ‘metaphysical’ characteristics.” Gates goes on to say, “It is the penchant to *generalize* based upon essences perceived as *biological* which defines racism.” Most critically, he identifies what he calls “The racist’s error” as a defect in perception; it is “error in *thought*. Gates contends, it is not merely, or only, his “behavior” that characterizes the racist.”⁸⁹⁹ James H. Sweet, in his fascinating article “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought” perhaps says it best: Since the “classification of human beings according to race was not then common,” we must conclude that “the treatment of black Africans from the Middle Ages to the early modern period appears to be racism without race.”⁹⁰⁰

A problem with discussing Othello’s “racial” identity lies in the multiple meanings of the word employed for blacks in the Renaissance, “Moor.” Consider this definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary* online:

Moor, n.2

Originally: a native or inhabitant of ancient Mauretania, a region of North Africa corresponding to parts of present-day Morocco and Algeria. Later usually: a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa (now mainly present-day Mauritania), who in the 8th cent. conquered Spain. In the Middle Ages, and as late as the 17th cent., the Moors were widely supposed to be mostly black or very dark-skinned, although the existence of ‘white Moors’ was recognized... Thus the term was often used, even into the 20th cent., with the sense ‘black person’... Cf. BLACKAMoor n. The Moors were driven out of their last Spanish stronghold in Granada at the end of the 15th cent.⁹⁰¹

In *Black Face Maligned Race*, Anthony Barthelemy takes great care to parse an earlier *O.E.D* definition, substantively the same as the one represented here, and he extracts the following observations: “we can identify by the word *Moor* people of many different races and different religions. *Moor* can mean, then, non-black Muslim, black Christian, or black Muslim.” (But he leaves out the non-Christian black, who, undoubtedly, should be included.) Consequently, the only known fact conveyed by the word “Moor” is the “certainty” of knowing “that the person referred to is not a European Christian.”⁹⁰² In “the emergent ideology of early modern Britain, the Muslim was depicted as occupying a place beneath the civilized European/Christian ... he was the ‘Other’ with whom there could only be holy war.” It was an ‘ancestral’ battle against the ‘infidel’ and Muslims of the ‘Barbary’ states lent their name to the emerging connotation of ‘Barbarian’ to mean the now common usage of ‘barbaric’, one who is uncivilized.⁹⁰³ Blackness, like “Mohamadism,” was a signifier of Stranger and strangeness. “As a rule, Elizabethan playwrights employed their Moorish [black] characters as a manifestation of the Other, strangers or aliens whose obvious physical difference raised disturbing questions about community and nationhood, cultural difference, and unarticulated assumptions about social organizations.”⁹⁰⁴ “Debates continue over when

this equation finally stabilized and when blackness supplanted religion as ‘the most important criterion for defining otherness.’”⁹⁰⁵

According to Nabil Matar,⁹⁰⁶ who is particularly concerned with the representation of Muslims in his monograph, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, it is impossible to consider the representation of blacks in English renaissance drama without identifying the practice of the writers to “conflate” the identity of North African Muslims with sub-Saharan Africans into the popular notion of the “Black Man” through the use of the label “Moor.”⁹⁰⁷ Ania Loomba reinforces this perspective, and adds “Indians’ into the mix, Renaissance theatricals, including Shakespeare’s, repeatedly confuse ‘Indians’ of various sorts and; Moors’ of different kinds: we have ‘negroes in Indian clothes,’ or black kings of Mexico, or the mixing up of Inca and Zoroastrian religious practices. One fairly common critical response to such mix-ups is to treat various outsiders through a single lens.”⁹⁰⁸

From Moors to Turks

Actually, what European Christian writers have done is to disassociate North African Muslims who are *not black* from the use of the word “Moor,” consigning its use rather more exclusively to people of black skin than would be customary in political or social life, irrespective of the subjects religious practice. Instead, these poets and dramatists have counter-conflated light-skinned Muslims who hail from the Ottoman Empire (and are subjects of the Sultan) with Muslims of the Kingdom of Morocco into the all-encompassing label “Turks”: a term defined by the Islamic faith that carries no connotation with respect to pigmentation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* posits the following definitions of the “Turk” to support this view.

Turk, n.

2. a. A native or inhabitant of Turkey; formerly, a member of the dominant race of the Ottoman empire; sometimes extended to any subject of the Grand Turk or Turkish Sultan, but usually restricted to Muslims; in earlier times, a Seljūk; from 1300, an Osmanli or Ottoman; one who was, or considered himself, a descendant of the Osmanlis or other Turks. **3. a.** Often used as = Muslim. (The Turks being to Christian nations the typical Muslim power from c 1300.).⁹⁰⁹

Unlike “Moor,” “Turk” has no identification with skin color or “blackness”. But “Turk” does carry a potential non-geographic relationship to Islam. “Ultimately, England’s real and imagined encounters with “Turks” all constitute responses to Islam.”⁹¹⁰

I will use the evidence Matar himself supplies to make my case: he alerts us that “from the 1580s until the 1630s, there were dozens of plays about Turks and Moors” before the London play-going public. And just as Othello was considered the quintessential “Moor,” it is the far lesser known set of characters Bajazeth, Ithamoe, and Anureth who came to define the “Turk” in the drama of the period. The depictions of these religious, ethnic and racial non-Europeans fall into two sets of onstage stereotypes: “The ‘Turk’ as cruel and tyrannical, deviant, and deceiving; the ‘Moor’ was sexually overdriven and emotionally uncontrollable, vengeful, and religiously superstitious. Significantly, the “Turk” and the “Moor” were symbolically all that an Englishman and a Christian was not:⁹¹¹ Both stereotypes are needed to ensure that the Muslim and the black man are each represented in their distinctions of religious and racial difference. Why have two signifying labels if this were not so? The black man’s most salient feature, even if he was a follower of Islam, was his skin color. There is no need for competing stereotypes for non-black Muslims. But, perhaps this grasping for too much order in, as has been demonstrated, previously, an anarchic domain of classification.

This all gets quite complicated in the story of Othello, a man of African nobility who Shakespeare identifies in the secondary title of his play as “the Moor of Venice”, which is, in

fact, an oxymoron. Othello is also identified in the text, as the “leader of the Venetian Armed” forces. He has thusly conferred upon him “the status of both “stranger” (Moor) and “hero” (leader). Othello, a “baptized Christian convert”, is commissioned to fight for the Venetian nation-state to protect the “republic’s interests from the ‘Turks,’” who, but for his publicized embracing of Christ, would be identified with the very “barbarians” he is sent to vanquish.

In 1603 the Ottoman Empire controlled most of Eastern Europe and one third of the known world. Venice was a leading bastion of Christian civilization. A nation of traders, it depended on open sea lanes; to preserve shipping routes, Venice maintained garrisons throughout the Mediterranean. The security of Rhodes and Cyprus was precarious at best; in 1572 Venice lost the latter island to the Turks.⁹¹²

“Thus when Othello, the Moor turned Christian, accuses his brawling Venetian followers of “turn[ing] Turk ...” (2.3,166), his hyperbole has a disturbing irony.” It is thought by many critics, that his suicide at the end of the drama “takes the form of a re-enacted slaughter of the Turk.” This line of reasoning dictates that, by murdering Desdemona, Othello has resorted to barbarity; he has, ergo, “turned Turk.”⁹¹³

NOTES

⁸¹³ Wu Ming (Writers collective) and Shaun Whiteside, *Altai*, 2013. “Wu Ming actually are a brilliant bunch of guys: Roberto Bui, Giovanni Cattabriga, Federico Guglielmi and Riccardo Pedrini, a collective of Italian writers and self-styled cultural terrorists based in Bologna, who write novels together under the name Wu Ming, and who like to compare their working method to jazz improvisation, role-playing games and 1970s Dutch total football.” Ian Sansom, “Altai by Wu Ming – Review,” *The Guardian*, June 1, 2013, sec. Books, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/01/altai-by-wu-ming-review>.

⁸¹⁴ Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 51.

⁸¹⁵ Hall, *Othello, the Moor of Venice*.

⁸¹⁶ Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History*, 29; 35.

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- ⁸¹⁷ Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History*, 36-37.
- ⁸¹⁸ Adam Hochschild, "Human Cargo," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/03/04/reviews/010304.04hochsct.html?mcubz=0>.
- ⁸¹⁹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 86-87.
- ⁸²⁰ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, 43.
- ⁸²¹ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 68.
- ⁸²² Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 164.
- ⁸²³ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 145.
- ⁸²⁴ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The History of Africa's Other Black Diaspora* (London: Atlantic Books, 2001), 41.
- ⁸²⁵ Hochschild, "Human Cargo."
- ⁸²⁶ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 68;71.
- ⁸²⁷ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 147.
- ⁸²⁸ Abercrombie, "When the Moors Ruled Spain."
- ⁸²⁹ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 145.
- ⁸³⁰ Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 65, doi:10.2307/2953313.
- ⁸³¹ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 69.
- ⁸³² Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 69-70.
- ⁸³³ Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves*, 37.
- ⁸³⁴ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 149.
- ⁸³⁵ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.
- ⁸³⁶ Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," 52.

⁸³⁷ Adrian Shubert, “Spain | Facts, Culture, History, & Points of Interest,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed September 10, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain>.

⁸³⁸ Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 52.

⁸³⁹ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 68.

⁸⁴⁰ Segal, *Islam’s Black Slaves*, 53.

⁸⁴¹ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 77.

⁸⁴² Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.

⁸⁴³ Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 145.

⁸⁴⁴ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.

⁸⁴⁵ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.

⁸⁴⁶ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.

⁸⁴⁷ Hochschild, “Human Cargo.”

⁸⁴⁸ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 78.

⁸⁴⁹ Abercrombie, “When the Moors Ruled Spain.”

⁸⁵⁰ Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 52.

⁸⁵¹ Abercrombie, “When the Moors Ruled Spain.”

⁸⁵² Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” 159.

⁸⁵³ Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 52.

⁸⁵⁴ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 96.

⁸⁵⁵ Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 78.

⁸⁵⁶ Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” 62.

⁸⁵⁷ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 97.

⁸⁵⁸ Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 13.

⁸⁵⁹ Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 61, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10370405>. (Gomez 1998, 61)

⁸⁶⁰ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 61.

⁸⁶¹ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 64.

⁸⁶² Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 106-07.

⁸⁶³ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 64-65.

⁸⁶⁴ Philips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 86.

⁸⁶⁵ Paul H. D. Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and Kate J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32–33.

⁸⁶⁶ Philips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 98-10.

⁸⁶⁷ As captured indelibly by Botticelli.

⁸⁶⁸ Thomas F. Madden, *Venice: A New History* (New York: Viking, 2012), 10–13.

⁸⁶⁹ See Madden, Crowley, Norwich. We should remember that it was from Venice that Marco Polo set out in search of a trade route to China, leaving a record of his extensive travels (c. 1300 CE) that captured the public imagination. Roger Crowley, *Empires of the Sea: The Final Battle for The Mediterranean, 1521-1580* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013).

⁸⁷⁰ Roger Crowley, *City of Fortune: How Venice Won and Lost a Naval Empire* (London: Faber, 2012), 4-5.

⁸⁷¹ John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 85.

⁸⁷² Crowley, *City of Fortune*, 5-6; Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 3.

⁸⁷³ Crowley, *City of Fortune*, 6-7. See also Norwich, *A History of Venice*.

⁸⁷⁴ Norwich, *A History of Venice*, chaps. 46, "The Fall," 605-631.

⁸⁷⁵ Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 609.

⁸⁷⁶ Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 632.

⁸⁷⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Venice and Its Lagoon,” *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, accessed September 10, 2017, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/394/>.

⁸⁷⁸ Canelletto’ artistry was overlooked for many years because he was a popular painter who worked on commission. Hence the ubiquity of his views of Venice. It was Joseph Smith, British Counsel in Venice, “who came up with the template that would turn Canelletto’s views into souvenirs for foreign tourists.” David Alan Brown, *The Secret of the Gondola* (Milano, Italy: Skira, 2014), 11.

⁸⁷⁹ The historic city districts. Shivani Vora, “In Venice, Navigating Like a Native,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 2014, sec. Travel, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/travel/in-venice-navigating-like-a-native.html>; Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, *Venice* (New York: MetroBooks, 2002), 15.

⁸⁸⁰ UNESCO, “Venice and Its Lagoon.”

⁸⁸¹ *The lidi*.

⁸⁸² Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 28-30.

⁸⁸³ Madden, *Venice: A New History*, 65-66.

⁸⁸⁴ Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi, eds., *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), sec. Introduction; 8.

⁸⁸⁵ Stanley Chojnacki, “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians in Fifteenth-Century Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1985): 240–43.

⁸⁸⁶ Chojnacki, “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians,” 245.

⁸⁸⁷ Chojnacki, “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians,” 266, 268-69.

⁸⁸⁸ Chojnacki, “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians,” 270.

⁸⁸⁹ Blake de Maria, *Becoming Venetian: Immigrants and the Arts in Early Modern Venice* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁸⁹⁰ de Maria, *Becoming Venetian*, ix–x.

⁸⁹¹ de Maria, *Becoming Venetian*, x.

⁸⁹² Michael Roche, "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, by Judith C. Brown and Robert Charles Davis (London; New York: Longman, 1998), 169; Carole Collier Frick, "Review: Frick on Brown and Davis, Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy," *H-Women, H-Net Reviews*, December 8, 1998, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx>.

⁸⁹³ Monica Chojnacka, "Women, Charity and Community in Early Modern Venice: The Casa delle Zitelle," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1998): 68–91.

⁸⁹⁴ Charles Edelman, *Shakespeare's Military Language: A Dictionary* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004), 90.

⁸⁹⁵ Michael Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors': Othello and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (1998): 365, doi:10.2307/2902233.

⁸⁹⁶ Margo Hendricks, "Introduction - Surveying 'Race' in Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare and Race*, by Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸⁹⁷ Hendricks, "Introduction – Surveying 'Race' in Shakespeare," 1-20.

⁸⁹⁸ Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 369.

⁸⁹⁹ Gates, "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, 204-205.

⁹⁰⁰ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 165.

⁹⁰¹ Oxford English Dictionary Online, "S.v. Moor, n.2," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121965?rskey=Vf8B5I&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

⁹⁰² Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge [u.a.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 7.

⁹⁰³ Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999).

⁹⁰⁴ Russ McDonald, "Introduction," in *Othello*, by William Shakespeare (Penguin Group US, 2002).

⁹⁰⁵ E. C. Bartels, "Too Many Blackamoors: Deportation, Discrimination, and Elizabeth I," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46, no. 2 (2006): 306.

⁹⁰⁶ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 13-15.

⁹⁰⁷ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 14.

⁹⁰⁸ Ania Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," in *Alternative Shakespeares - Volume 2*, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 170.

⁹⁰⁹ Oxford English Dictionary Online, "S.v. Turk, n.1," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/207622?rskey=PJgql5&result=1#eid>.

⁹¹⁰ Stephan Schmuck, "From Sermon to Play: Literary Representations of 'Turks' in Renaissance England 1550-1625," *Literature Compass* 2: 11, accessed September 16, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/960644/From_Sermon_to_Play_Literary_Representations_of_Turks_in_Renaissance_England_1550_1625.

⁹¹¹ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 4; 13-14.

⁹¹² Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 22.

⁹¹³ Neill "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 361.

PART THREE: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 89. Georg Braun and Frans Hogenburg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 1572. Venetia. The National Library of Israel.

http://primo.nli.org.il/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=NL&docId=NNL_ALEPH002370027, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 90. Unknown, Manuscript Arabe 5847, fol. 105, Maqâma 34. A 13th Century's manuscript depicting slave market in Yemen. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Figure 91. Unknown author, Port of Seville, XVI Century.
<http://spainillustrated.blogspot.com/2012/06/sevilla-capital>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 92. Unknown artist, *The Manicongo King giving audience to his subjects and Portuguese visitors*, before 1850.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kongo_audience.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 93. Unknown artist, *Chafariz d'el Rey in Alfama*, c. 1560–80. Lisbon, Flemish painting. Oil on wood, 93 × 163 cm. The Berardo Collection, Lisbon, Portugal. <https://www.berardocollection.com/?sid=50002&article=32&lang=en>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 94. Detail of figure 93, showing a black horseman.



Figure 95. Detail of figure 93, showing a black man being detained.



Figure 96. Canaletto (1697–1768), *The Entrance to the Grand Canal, Venice*, c. 1730. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Figure 97. Titian, *Emperor Suleiman, The Magnificent*, c. 1530. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



Figure 98. Topkapı Palace, Istanbul, Turkey, 2016. Image by Getty Images.
<https://lonelyplanetwpnews.imgix.net/2016/10/Topkapi-2-GettyImages-595284284.jpg>,
accessed December, 2017.



Figure 99. Francis Smith, *Kisler Aga, Chief of the Black Eunuchs and First Keeper of the Serraglio*, c.1763-1779. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. <http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/1666163>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 100. Vittore Carpaccio, *Hunting on the Lagoon* (recto); c 1490-1495. Oil on panel, 75.6 × 63.8 cm (29 3/4 × 25 1/8 in.). The Getty Center. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/686/vittore-carpaccio-hunting-on-the-lagoon-recto-letter-rack-verso-italian-venetian-about-1490-1495/>, accessed December, 2017.

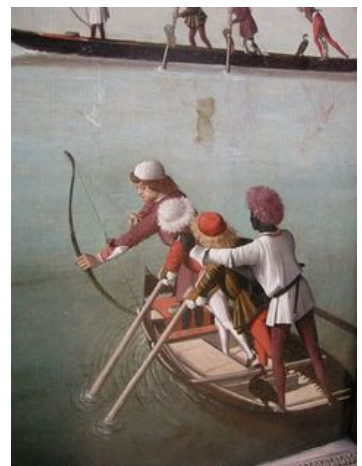


Figure 101. Detail of figure 100 showing a black man.



Figure 102. Map of Venice, Cyprus, and Constantinople. Map by C. I. Gable.
<http://www.boglewood.com/timeline/cyprusloss.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 103. Roman Ruins near Famagusta, n/d. Photo by Toursbylocals.com
<https://www.toursbylocals.com/Cyprus-Tours>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 104. Unknown author, *Bronze statue of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus*, Discovered in 1928. Cyprus Archaeological Museum, Nicosia, Lefkosia, Cyprus, 2013. Photograph by David Allsop. <https://davidallsopclassics.wordpress.com/page/14/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 105. Unidentified artist, *Limassol Cyprus Cathedral of St. Lazarus*, n/d. Reproduced from Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Christopher Schabel, *Lemesos: A History of Limassol in Cyprus from Antiquity to the Ottoman Conquest* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015). <http://in-cyprus.com/limassol-history-gets-fresh-chronicle/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 107. Olfert (Olivier) Dapper, *Description Exacte Des Isles De L' Archipel*, 1703. Folio 360x270mm. Detail of the city of Famagusta. Originally published in Dutch as *Naukeurige Beschryving der Eilanden in de Archipel der Middelantsche Zee*. (Amsterdam 1688). The French edition was published by George Gallet in Amsterdam.
http://prokipr.ru/maps_history_1700.html, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 108. Titian, *Caterina Cornaro as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, 1488-1576. Oil on canvas, 102.5 x 72. Caterina was the last Venetian Queen of Cyprus, from 1542 until 1599. Virtual Uffizi Gallery.



Figure 109. Unknown, *Painting of the Battle of Lepanto of 1571*, late 16th Century. Oil on canvas, 1270 mm x 2324 mm. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. Caird Fund.



Figure 110. Stairs on city walls of Famagusta, North Cyprus, 2012. Photograph by Peter K.Lloyd / Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-famagusta-north-cyprus-staircase-up-medieval-venetian-city-wall-50977218.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 111. Famagusta Walls, 2015. Photograph by Renate Stenshorn, Raus ins Leben.de. <http://rausinsleben.de/famagusta-othello-und-der-granatapfelbaum/famagusta-stadtmauer-2/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 112. Othello Castle, Famagusta, Cyprus, 2015. Photograph by Katerina Papathanasiou, Greekreporter.com. : <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/05/23/cyprus-political-parties-in-turkish-occupied-famagusta/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 113. Famagusta, aerial view of Othello's tower, Northern Cyprus. Photograph by Sonia Halliday. <http://www.soniahalliday.com/category-view3.php?pri=CYN3-10B-23.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 114. North Cyprus Famagusta Venetian lion emblem 1492 on Othello's Tower, n/d. Photograph by Roberto Piperno, romeartlover.it. <https://www.romeartlover.it/Cipro1.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 115. St. Nikolaos Cathedral, Famagusta (1291-1371), n/d. Photograph by Gerhard Haubold.

**PART FOUR: THE BLACK PRESENCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S
LONDON AND IN HIS IMAGINATION**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

**SETTING THE SCENE
SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND**

CHAPTER TWELVE

**SHAKESPEARE'S BLACK NEIGHBORS
STRANGERS WITHIN THE REALM
The Multicultural *Milieu* of Tudor and Early Stuart London**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**SHAKESPEARE'S AFRICAN IMAGINARY
"Moors" on the London Stage
and
The Representation of Blackness**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Setting the Scene: Shakespeare's England

Tumultuous change in fifteenth and sixteenth century Western Europe (fig. 116) grew out of the collapse of feudalism and the rise of the European innovation of nation-statehood under resolute monarchs like Elizabeth I and her father, Henry VIII (fig. 117). Henry's schism with Rome in 1533 to insure the legitimacy of his daughter (*in utero*), not only shattered the unity of Catholic Christendom, it atomized a world of shared belief, contributing to a more regionalized consciousness of national identity in its stead.⁹¹⁴ The principal political form in Western Europe was the sovereign state, with the rest of Europe comprised of coexisting composite states with "a myriad of smaller territorial and jurisdictional units jealously guarding their independent status."⁹¹⁵ The emergent technology of the printing press in the second half of the fifteenth century with its movable type established the means to disseminate books and other forms of print culture in the vernacular. This fueled an information revolution unmatched until our own digital age.

The Protestant Reformation's key tenet, the worshipper's relationship to God through justification by faith alone, was predicated upon individual access to the Bible, which the printing press provided. Newspapers, political pamphlets, broadsides, poems, ballads, plays and other print media – what Benedict Anderson calls "print capitalism" – played a major role in circulating the influx and absorption of new ideas and learning that informed an increasingly literate populace. The printing press quite simply democratized knowledge. Because of this, information moved quickly. And more flowed. All this contributed to the

conception of nation and the propagation of the idea of nation through the formation of an “imagined community.”⁹¹⁶ It was this “imagined community,” a term coined by Anderson, that both created Shakespeare and allowed him to contribute so much back to his age – the Age of Elizabeth.

The Female Factor

In an era in which convention and myth promulgated the belief that women were inferior to men and women were the legal and functional wards of their male relatives, for a female to wield dominion over men was seen to be an affront against Nature and God’s Law. That Elizabeth I was one of the most influential monarchs of her time and a legend in the history of the realm of England was a stupendous accomplishment for any royal, let alone a queen. Culturally conditioned as he was, Henry VIII could never have foreseen this. He operated within the hierarchical domain of exclusively male authority, which is why Elizabeth’s father experienced such anxiety over insuring he passed his kingdom on to a male heir, not wanting to upset the custom of gendered primogeniture.

A situation in law which only ended recently to accommodate the next generation of heirs to throne with the birth of Prince William’s and the Duchess of Cambridge’s first child. The fact that a son was born to the royal couple, Prince George, diminished the practical effects of the new legislation by making it a moot point. But that it took four hundred years to insure a future Elizabeth would not miss her opportunity is a testament to the power of patriarchy. Considering that the Tudor queen was such a phenomenal success, you might think this would have been looked at before.

It is hard to imagine that had Henry's longed-for son – Edward VI – lived to manhood that he could ever have come close to matching his half-sister's natural affinity for the job of monarch. With a life full of incident and drama, nothing has earned Elizabeth greater approbation – both then and now – than her ability as a woman to exercise her sway successfully in a man's world. Operating within a hidebound patriarchal system Elizabeth called herself “a prince,” evidence of her grasp of the theater of politics. “We princes,” she said, “are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world.” Elizabeth's use of this gender inversion to describe her identity as a ruler means that she understood she had to be unsexed, detached from her anomalous femaleness to brand herself as a vessel for rule. At her coronation she proclaimed her marriage to England.⁹¹⁷ This was a brilliant political strategy that embodied the state in her person, made manifest to her subjects in a carefully and effectively constructed public persona: Gloriana. It was a masterful performance of inverted gender stereotype.

The cult of her virginity, the Queen as England's bride, functioned as an emblem of Elizabeth's autonomy. It was expedient for the queen to divorce herself from the reproductive function of her sex, so as not to subordinate herself to a man. Elizabeth decided that she would not be a working mother: that she could not have it all – even as queen. She knew that she could not be operative as a sovereign head of state if she were also royal incubator to the heir to the throne. Marriage of her time was simply inimical to female agency. Instead Elizabeth chose to express herself in the independent exercise of her power rather than to secure the Tudor line. No doubt she learned from her father how impossible it was to control dynasty in any case. No. Not even a Ferdinand and Isabella style partnership for her.

As England's Virgin Queen, Elizabeth was the apotheosis of the artist's muse as

cultural and political icon. She presided over the artistic corollary to the English Reformation, the English Renaissance, the vigorous flowering of music and art, and especially a vulgate literary culture – the poetry and drama that bear her eponym: Elizabethan.

As the popular entertainment media of its day, Elizabethan theater exerted enormous influence on civil society in which the early modern “scenic poets” helped to paint and shape the ethos of their age.⁹¹⁸ In England, Shakespeare’s works (both on stage and in print) contributed enduringly to a coalescing body of intellectual property. As nation emerged as an idea in early modern Europe, so, too, it became a political reality.⁹¹⁹ The advance of a socially constructed “imagined political community” – a people possessed of a kinship grounded in a common culture that is recognized by its members - the very architects of its invention – was helped along by the English commercial theater. It was a conscious effort to create a national culture that would sustain England’s coming greatness.⁹²⁰ Shakespeare was his queen’s helpmeet in constructing a national identity for an England preparing to compete on the global stage.

*This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.*

– William Shakespeare, *Richard II*

The Elizabethan theater was a public arena of the communal imagination for the nation – imagination meant as the “property of collectives, not merely the faculty of the gifted individual,” although that was on display, as well.⁹²¹ It was where the very idea of nationhood itself was practiced, the notions of just and unjust governance debated, and moral economies arbitrated, as in the case of *Othello*. In a moment of true metatheater the Chorus of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* directly asks audiences attending performances of the drama at the multi-sided Globe playhouse (fig. 118, fig. 119, fig. 120) – a theatre in the round – if they are willing to imagine the real world events brought to life through the artifice of the players’ stagecraft. Will the spectators suspend their disbelief; the Chorus asks: *Can this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram / Within this wooden O [the stage house] the very casques [helmets] / That did affright the air at Agincourt?*⁹²² Indeed, they could. The theater was a literal staging ground for social action and not only for escape. The theater was where history – still alive in current memory – was reenacted.

Stage history and recorded history aligned in 1594, ten years before the first recorded performance of *Othello*, with the production of George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (Al Ksar al-Kabir). For the first time on the English dramatic stage a black Moor “of any dramatic significance” was introduced.⁹²³ Muly Mahamet was his name, and his character was referred to in Peele’s stage directions as both “the Moore” and the “Negro Moore.”

Muly Mahamet is an actual historical figure, (Muhammad al-Mutawakkil), a late sixteenth century claimant to the Moroccan throne.⁹²⁴ In Peele’s play he is a totally loathsome stereotype of the perfidious Moor: “Black was his looke, and bloudie in his deeds.” The actual historical events depicted in the *Battle of Alcazar* were to have real significance for England’s future as a world power.

The young king of Portugal, Sebastian I (1557-1578) (fig. 121, fig. 122), is the ill-fated hero of the *The Battle of Alcazar*. The play tells the dramatized true story of how in 1578 the naïve Sebastian squanders his kingdom and his life on a foolhardy, quixotic quest of empire, impelling him to re-install the deposed Muly Mahamet who sought Christian military support on the throne of Morocco. Sebastian loses the decisive battle of Alcazar because of Muly's treachery. The Portuguese king disappears on the field of battle and presumed dead for he is never seen again. It is the last disaster in a history of Portuguese follies in Morocco. In the play, as in life, Portugal, having wasted its army and lost its vainglorious king, is left with a succession crisis.

Fatally vulnerable to its acquisitive neighbor, Portugal loses its sovereignty as a nation when Philip II of Spain simply appropriates this once commanding kingdom two years later.⁹²⁵ For the next sixty years the proud and powerful Portuguese maritime empire is subordinated to Spain, annexed in the Iberian Union. Elizabeth offered sanctuary to the Portuguese Pretender to the throne, Dom Antonio (fig. 123),⁹²⁶ a bastard son of the legitimate dynasty, and installed her guest in a town house in London, complete with his retinue of black slaves. She even set him up in trade, forming the Guinea Company.⁹²⁷ Alas, poor Portugal. Such an ignominious end to The Navigator's dream – a narcissist's empty crusade in Morocco – just a few short generations out from Portugal's status as “the world's greatest exploring nation.”⁹²⁸ That is one narrative. Another narrative is to say to me say that Portugal got what it deserved. What is the need to be triumphalist for a nation that contributed the institution of racialized chattel slavery for the modern age?

With Spain's might swelled with the Iberian Union the balance of power in Europe dramatically shifts, leaving the door open for England to step into the imperial role to

challenge her rivals.

When Elizabeth inherited the throne after the death of her Catholic half-sister, Mary Tudor, in 1558, the traditional Anglo-Spanish alliance crumbled over a failed marriage pact and religious differences. Mary's widower, yes, the same Philip II of Spain, was rejected by Elizabeth as a suitor. After this, there was no quelling Spanish approbation: England was a nation of heretics with an apostate monarch at the vanguard of the Protestant cause. The accounts of Catholic exiles in Spain seeking refuge from persecution for their faith under Elizabeth further inflamed Spanish antipathy towards England's Queen. The cruel deeds of Bloody Mary (as Henry VIII other daughter had been known) for her part in the persecution of Protestants during her brief reign, made Spanish censure particularly hypocritical in the eyes of English Protestants.

The Black Legend (*la leyenda negra*) that featured Spain as a nation of fanatics bent on an empire of cruelty was on the rise in the English popular imagination.⁹²⁹ This fervor was fueled by, the publication in 1583 of a damning indictment of Spanish imperialism by a Spanish clergyman Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. The book was called a *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. It was an inflammatory report, which exposed Spain and its colonial agents as perpetrators of atrocities against the indigenous peoples of the Americas that outraged the English.⁹³⁰ This not not long before England's colonization of North America got underway: disastrously, at the start, with the founding of the lost colony of Roanoke in 1587 under the auspices of Sir Walter Raleigh. But soon English colonists were perpetrating their own outrages against native peoples in British North America – because they could.

As a priority of her reign, Elizabeth domestically secured the Henrician Schism and the foundation of an Anglican Protestant church through Parliament.⁹³¹ On the international

front, she saved her coreligionist-subjects from the desperate crusade of Philip II to restore the Catholic faith in England after Elizabeth executed her cousin, the accused Catholic pretender to the throne, Mary Queen of Scots, for plotting to depose her in 1587. The defeat of the “Invincible” Spanish Armada in 1588 by her majesty’s fleet was a stunning victory for the English nation. Although this crushing blow to a formidable enemy did not end war with Spain, it positioned England as a player for world dominion.

It was during Elizabeth’s reign that the commercial and trade prospects of exploration and colonization as a means to wealth and empire came into English minds.⁹³² England was hampered by fiscal constraints. The English maritime model was to be organized around joint-stock companies of private investors granted royal monopolies.⁹³³ Not unlike Portugal a century earlier. The English dipped a toe in the water of the African slave trade. The Queen’s own Treasurer of the Royal Navy, Sir John Hawkins led a double life as a slave raiding privateer. Hawkins, his cousin Sir Francis Drake and Martin Frobisher bedeviled the Spanish to no end with their piracy by raiding Spanish galleons and, in the Caribbean, attacking their ports.⁹³⁴ The line of demarcation between pirate and trader, honest goods and contraband were pretty diffuse.⁹³⁵ Demonizing the Spaniards was part of the game. In spite of the anti-Spanish propaganda, some futurists saw a model in Spain as the empire of its day.

The famous cosmographer Richard Hakluyt (fig. 124) understood that empire was as much an idea as it was a reality. He saw the need for a propagandistic marketing campaign to lay the groundwork for a Protestant vision of empire to counter Spanish hegemony, or, Catholic power, if you will. Although Hakluyt would only speak of this business cloaked in terms of providing the court a historiography of maritime exploration, his agenda was nation building.⁹³⁶ His was driven by ideology: the primacy of English Protestantism; the rise of

national greatness; and thirdly, commercial expansion.⁹³⁷ In other words, “to gain honor, to save souls, and to seek profit.” All of which would be centered around the English overseas venture of plantation colonies.⁹³⁸

In 1603, with the death of Elizabeth, the Tudor dynasty gave way to its Stuart cousins. The son of the martyred Scottish queen avenged his mother’s aspirations to the Crown of England by assuming Elizabeth’s place as lawful heir – but, as required, he was a Protestant. It was a pyrrhic victory. When James VI of Scotland ascended to the throne of England’s fabled Queen of forty-five years – becoming James I of England (fig. 125) – “Britain” was formally established. The new kingdom, the Union of Crowns, more a personal aspiration of the new king than a political one – was a conglomerate of England, Scotland, Ireland and the principality of Wales contained within the north Atlantic Archipelago of the British Isles.⁹³⁹ A true United Kingdom of Great Britain would not become a reality until 1707. Symbolically, through this Union, the groundwork was laid for the success of empire - after a wrenching Civil War and the Puritan Interregnum – in the decades ahead. In his Puritan zeal, Cromwell turned his imperial attention to the settlement of Ireland and the apostasy of its Catholic populace, diverting government attention from the New World colonial mission.

The Royal Africa Company would be chartered at the earliest opportunity after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and a robust and cruel slave trade would be born in Britain. After years of war among the nations of Europe, in the Peace Treaty of Utrecht (1713) the coveted *Asiento*, the permission granted by Spain to other European countries to sell slaves to the Spanish colonies the primary markets, passed to England.⁹⁴⁰ This sealed Britain’s destiny as an empire based on trade with West Africa in human cargo.⁹⁴¹ *Rule*

*Britannia!*⁹⁴² It is to its ignominious shame that England, although a latecomer “became the leading slave mistress, slave trader, and slave carrier of the world.”⁹⁴³

‘Othello’ A Cultural Product of its Time

We would know nothing of Shakespeare output as a playwright if it were not for the printing press. It is worth taking a look at *Othello*’s history as a text.

ITEM: Shakespeare’s *Othello* was first published as a stand-alone edition in 1622. *Othello* “Q1” (Quarto 1) (fig. 126), as it is known, came out in standard quarto format, a small book of printed sheets folded twice to form four leaves. The *First Quarto* was published under the title “The Tragedy of Othello, the Moore of Venice.” This date marked eighteen years from the first recorded performance of the drama in 1604 and fell six years after Shakespeare’s death in 1616. The *Othello First Quarto* was presumably typeset from a manuscript received from someone in or close to Shakespeare’s acting company. Its title page reads as follows:

*The tragedy of Othello, the Moore of Venice. As it hath beene diuerse times acted at the Globe, and at the Black-Friers, by his Maiesties seruants. Written by William Shakespeare.*⁹⁴⁴

ITEM: One year later, in 1623, *Othello, the Moore of Venice* was included in the First Folio: the original collected plays of Shakespeare, which was officially edited by two of his colleagues, John Heminge and Henry Condell. These fellow Kings’ Men were close enough to Shakespeare in his lifetime that they were mentioned as beneficiaries in his will. A folio⁹⁴⁵ is much larger and more prestigious format than a quarto and far more expensive to produce,

signifying the importance of this project. Copies of the First Folio sold for the substantial sum of one pound each.⁹⁴⁶

There is no logic to which plays appeared in independent versions before the First Folio. Neither Shakespeare's literary reputation nor his professional life was dependent on the printing of his plays.⁹⁴⁷ Playwrights did not own the copyright to their works; the printer did. But with the publication of the First Folio, already Shakespeare's immortality as a "scenic poet" was heralded by rival playwright Ben Jonson, who praised him in the dedicatory pages of the First Folio with these words: "He was not of an age, but for all time."⁹⁴⁸

ITEM: Although the *First Quarto* and the First Folio versions of *Othello* were published only a year apart, they are, as Leah Marcus notes, "markedly unlike." The two versions although principally the same have enough textual variance to have vexed scholars for hundreds of years. The Folio contains approximately 160 lines of text that are not present in the *First Quarto*, making it possible to argue that *Othello* should be considered, like *King Lear*, a two-text play. "The added lines are by no means innocuous: they contain some of the play's most racially charged language." And Q1 "does not rein in the cultural danger represented by Othello's blackness and sexuality with anything like the virulence" of the Folio version of the play. Marcus suggests the disparities in the two versions of the text could have been due to changing views towards censorship by the Master of the Revels, the author's own preferred revisions, or the exigencies of staging.⁹⁴⁹ Truly we have no way of knowing for sure. To solve the "two-text play" conundrum, textual scholars often conflate the two version of *Othello* creating an edited edition from both available texts.

ITEM: Modern editions of *Othello* have dropped the subtitle of the play, "The Moore of Venice," although Othello is, of course, repeatedly referred to as "the Moor" in the body of

the text. Additionally, in updating Shakespeare's spelling in published versions of the play, "Moore" has become "Moor."

Sources

Shakespeare's primary source material for Othello is a tale, "Un Capitano Moro" ("A Moorish Captain"), which appears in a 1565 Italian collection of stories by Giovanni Battista Giraldi, commonly known as Cinthio. Perhaps Shakespeare had access to a private English translation of the Cinthio's work, *A Hundred Tales (De Gli Hecatommithi (or Ecatomiti)*, as there was no published English version extant. We have no exact idea what languages Shakespeare spoke, although his works would indicate varying degrees of knowledge of Italian, French and Spanish. So he may have consulted his source in translation: a French translation appeared in 1583 and one in Spanish in 1590. In Cinthio's Italian story the main character has no given name. He is described as "a Moor" and referred to simply as "the Moor" (*il moro*). When Cinthio's Moor assumes rank in the "Dramatis Personae" of Shakespeare's tragedy, he becomes "Othello." Because references to the name Othello are not to be readily found in any previous text, it has been surmised that Shakespeare invented the name.

"What's in a name?"

It is possible that the name "Othello" evoked several associations for early modern English audiences. It suggests foreignness as in the Ottomites (the very enemy Othello is sent to fight by the Venetian Signiory) or Othoman, which also sounds like Otherman. Critic Russ McDonald, has suggested that Othello is an anagram for the name "Thorello," a character in Ben Jonson's bawdy comedy *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), a play in which, we have

documentary evidence, Shakespeare acted. The name Thorello is itself an eponym for the Italian word “torello,” which means a small or young bull: a bullock, (which can also mean a castrated bull of any age). The use of this name is very apt in Johnson’s play. Thorello, a bridegroom, has concerns that his new wife is cuckolding him. Although Johnson treats the marriage betrayal theme – “the imaginary cuckold” – as farce, London theatergoers could certainly have made a connection to Othello as another play in which infidelity is treated - albeit as the stuff of tragedy. McDonald’s thesis has been widely circulated in Shakespeare scholarship.

A number of years ago, critic Cherrell Guilfoyle suggested a potential model for Othello in the English Charlemagne Romances. These texts, composed in Middle English and Anglo Norman, have as their subject matter the heroic exploits of the 8th-century French emperor, Charles the Great. They were adapted from the French in the 14th and 15th century in conjunction with England’s Hundred Years War with France. The character of a Saracen knight, a decidedly black Moor out of Spain, “a famous warrior, and noble,” who made his military reputation in Italy, is variously identified in the English versions by orthographic variations which lead to considerations of pronunciation: *Otuel*, *Otuell*, *Othuell*, and *Otuwel*. Like Othello, Otuel is a Christian convert who marries a white noblewoman, in his case Charlemagne’s daughter. Guilfoyle provides ample evidence that Shakespeare knew the Romances, yet this theory does not receive widespread recognition in critical editions of Shakespeare’s drama. Furthermore, that a prototype for Othello existed in Shakespeare time and goes unrecognized is further testimony to the impact of Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. To take an obscure cultural reference and turn it into popular myth, demonstrates the effect *Othello* had on the collective consciousness, underscoring the power the Elizabethan and early

Jacobean commercial theater, the popular entertainment media of its day that was accessible to the ruling class and to common folk alike.

Anyone who has studied Shakespeare understands certain truisms regarding the text. For one, there were no rules of spelling in Shakespeare's day. He wrote it as he heard it, being the operative trope. And in a day when type was set by hand, surely how the words came out had something to do with printer's ear. Furthermore, spelling customs were vastly different from what we operate with as standard today. In fact, standard was a concept that only attempted a foothold much later. It was not until 1755 with the publication of Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, that any expertise was asserted over the English language. Over time textual editors have emendated Shakespeare's complete works, and countless scholarly editions of the plays now circulate. This army of experts not only looks for the intended meanings, modernize spellings and conflate various early printed versions. One could argue that all this "cleaning up" of the text has simply obfuscated rather than clarified Shakespeare's original meaning. Purists consult single edition Quartos, when available, or the First Folio. The first *Quarto* of *Othello* dates from 1622. One year later the First Folio, which includes all thirty-six plays, the gold standard of Shakespearean textual scholarship, was printed. It was based on copies that are now lost to time. Much to our dismay, no undisputed manuscripts exist of any of the plays of Shakespeare. Several photo facsimile versions have been published of this original folio edition, including Charlton Hinman's *The Norton Facsimile* (1968), of which the second edition (1996) is still in print. Neil Freeman has produced a modern type version of the First Folio (2000), which makes the original's textual features easily accessible. In 2012, The British Library released a new audio

CD, *Shakespeare's Original Pronunciation*, which features speeches and scenes pronounced in performance, as Shakespeare would have intended them.

Where does this leave us with “Otuel,” “Otuell,” “Othuell,” and “Otuwel” in relationship to “Othello”? Consider the pronunciation of two English words: “time”: the infinite, non-spatial continuum of existence (past present and future), as in “tomorrow and tomorrow creeps at this petty pace”; and “thyme”: a culinary and medicinal herb. These two words with very different spellings sound exactly the same their pronunciation. It turns out there are more guidelines to early English spelling than imagined.

Consider this entry from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Second edition, 1989).

th, n.

In a few proper names and other words derived from or influenced by French, as *Thomas*, *Thompson*, *thyme*, *th* is pronounced as *t*; several other words were formerly so treated, and even spelt with *t*, e.g. *theatre*, *theme*, *theology*, *throne*, *authentic*, *orthography*... The late Latin and Romanic treatment of *th* as *t* often led to the spelling *th* where *t* was etymological, as in *Thames*... In some Middle English MSS. *th* frequently appears for *t* or for *d*.

The practice of conflating of ‘t’ and ‘th’ in pronunciation and orthography certainly brings Otuell and Othuell together with Othello. It also begs the consideration that the ‘th’ in Othello was pronounced ‘t’ in Shakespeare’s day.

L-vocalization is another aspect of speech that affects the name Othello. Readily attributable to Cockney pronunciation, L-vocalization is when a “w” sound replaces the “l” in English words. L-vocalization is becoming much more prevalent although it has affected certain population segments for hundreds of years. It is quite likely that L-vocalization could become standard speech within a century. By way of example, it can be heard in the way pop singer Adele speaks.

With these possible features of pronunciation in mind it is not unreasonable to think that “Othello” might have been spoken in Shakespeare’s day as “Otwo.” In that case the Akan name of the people of modern day Ghana “Otuo” would sound closer to the original than the way we pronounce Othello today.

Knowledge Production: The Changer and the Changed

Literacy is more than just learning to read and write; it is a social practice that when viewed as a basic human *right* is a tool for freedom and empowerment. The power that literacy gave to the masses to personally interpret the word of god – in the vernacular – and bypass priest intercessors was fundamental to modernity and the birth of individual liberty. In England Shakespeare’s works contributed enduringly to this body of intellectual property and hence to the advance of “an imagined political community” – “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” – a nation possessed of an affinity grounded in a common culture.

CHAPTER TWELVE: SHAKESPEARE'S BLACK NEIGHBORS STRANGERS WITHIN THE REALM

The Multicultural *Milieu* of Tudor and Early Stuart London

SONNET 127

*In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame:
For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
Fairing the foul with Art's false borrowed face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
At such who, not born fair,⁹⁵⁰ no beauty lack,
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.*

– William Shakespeare

London, A City Full of Strangers

That borderline figure, who defines the limits of the human— customarily from the farther side, though never without some ambiguity—has been named variously the “shadow”, the “other”, the alien”, the “outsider”, the “stranger”.

– Leslie A. Fieldler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (1972)

Writing in the late 1970s, the distinguished Sierra Leonean literary historian Eldred D. Jones was among the first of very few scholars to point out that critics have made “quite erroneous statements about Shakespeare’s conception of Othello,” the noble Moor, because they ignored “the presence in fair numbers of black West Africans in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”⁹⁵¹ All these years later the debate over whether or not Shakespeare encountered people of African descent in his life in any meaningful way is still a topic of some controversy. I take the position that he did.

Based on the historical evidence we have the majority of these African English, these *strangers* – strangers because they were not citizens of London, as Shakespeare himself was not – lived within the one-mile radius area of the City (fig. 127).

Shakespeare on Silver Street

The City of London (fig. 128, fig. 129, fig. 130) proper is where the poet spent some of his most productive years in the theater as a lodger – a rent paying tenant. From 1603-1605, Shakespeare lived in a house belonging to Protestant refugees of a foreign Catholic state, a French immigrant artisan couple who made fancy headgear (or “tires”). The house, a typical Tudor structure, stood on the eastern corner of Monkwell and Silver Streets in St. Olave’s

Parish Cripplegate opposite the churchyard (fig. 132, fig. 131).⁹⁵² Shakespeare first year living on Silver Street in 1603 (fig. 133, fig. 134), was “a disrupted year: the death of Queen Elizabeth (fig. 135), a savage outbreak of plague leading to the closure of the theatres.”⁹⁵³

Shakespeare (fig. 136) turned forty the following year. He was at the height of his profession, a respected playwright and player with the top company in the land, the Kings Men. 1604 was the year that we have the first record of a performance of *Othello*. But the theater was a calling that was “prey to the hostility of officialdom, which saw the playhouses as civic nuisance – a potential for riotous assembly, for prostitution and pickpocketing, for the transmission of infectious diseases and (no less) of dissident ideas.”⁹⁵⁴

Why Shakespeare rented and did not own his own house cannot be known for certain; it is likely because he was technically a “foreigner” in the City of London, a migrant from the provinces whose family home (and family) were in Stratford, in Warwickshire (fig. 137).⁹⁵⁵ The Mountjoy house – destroyed later in The Great Fire of London, 1666 – stood across from the still extant St. Olave’s churchyard. This was considered a highly respectable and prosperous neighborhood in a “rather middling London parish.”⁹⁵⁶ Today the site of the house where the playwright lived with the Huguenot Mountjoys is near the excavation of remains of the Roman City walls. It is within view of the Barbican Centre’s Museum of London, entombed under a modern-day car park. But just standing in St. Olave’s churchyard a site where Shakespeare could have stood offered a special moment for this Shakespeare scholar.

Unfortunately, the parish records belonging to this church, that are our best documentation of blacks in the City of London in Shakespeare’s day, were destroyed in a fire.

Royal Proclamations against “Negars and Blackamoors”

As for Shakespeare’s neighbors of African descent. By the end of Elizabeth’s forty-five-year reign (1558-1603), there were enough black people living in England – both free and enslaved – that the queen was lobbied three times to expel from her kingdom the “great numbers of Negars and Blackamoors⁹⁵⁷ which are crept into this realm.” The presence of these foreigners was troubling to local London authorities for the ways in which they added to “the distress of the English poor” by exacerbating the pernicious social problems of the realm, “poverty and hunger.” Three royal proclamations – issued between 1596 and⁹⁵⁸ 1601⁹⁵⁹ illustrate the Crown’s case. The Queen’s interventions were intended to exacerbate the problem by reducing the numbers of the blacks in Britain “of which kinde of people there are allready here to manie.”

The first two proclamations had no effect. As a consequence (it would appear) – in an effort to show that the Crown really meant business – the third one called for wholesale banishment: “Her Majesty's pleasure therefore ys that those kinde of people should be sent forth of the lande.” Accordingly, the unfortunate “Negars and Blackamoors” were to be rounded up and given to a German slave trader, Caspar van Senden, in “payment” for duties he had performed.⁹⁶⁰ “The royal orders, however, were of no importance, for as long as the Africans were granted no legal status and the owners enjoyed the freedom of an unregulated market, the queen's policy of containment was simply ignored.”⁹⁶¹

These proclamations have been much discussed by scholars since they were brought to light in the early 1970s. They are certainly valuable for the documentary evidence they provide of the presence of people of African descent in England during Shakespeare’s

lifetime. They also speak to the social concerns, the alarm that the presence of blacks raised to the government, and the Crown's concern for the effect they had on the native population. Clearly from the language it is evident that they were undesirables. That the proclamations were not considered terribly serious speaks to the reality that there was not enough of a critical mass of Africans in Elizabeth's realm to truly be threatening. But that the queen turned to a slave trader to remove the Africans speaks to their ambiguous status. Scholars of the period often note that slavery was not legal any longer in Britain. And "England disposed of no legal code to offer a slave system under the Tudor monarchs."⁹⁶² But this does not mean that black people did not live under circumstances that were very like slavery.

Referencing the proclamations, David Dabydeen notes, "for the first time in English history, blacks were used as scapegoats for social evils."⁹⁶³ There is no question that the 1590s was a decade of bad harvests, a scarce food supply, and abject poverty. And immigrants were often blamed when times were tough; Africans were an easy target, they were visibly alien, so when their numbers grew their presence was threatening to the status quo.

According to Emily C. Bartels, the Queen, by "justifying the geographical alienation of certain 'Negars and Blackamoors' creates an ersatz class separation, placing these immigrants "categorically apart" from her 'own liege people'" Secondly, it is historically significant that while Elizabeth "figures the English in terms of their national allegiance, she designates the 'Negars and Blackamoors' as 'kind' of people, 'those kinde,' defined by skin color." Through her proclamations "she depicts and condemns 'Negars and Blackamoors' generically as a race – a 'black race.'" It can be argued that the result of this "articulation" on the part of the monarch "was the inscription and prediction of a racist ideology that defined

and derogated ‘black’ subjects categorically.”⁹⁶⁴ Bartels last point should give pause to those who would argue to speak race in the early modern period is anachronistic because of the lack of any formulated racial ideology.

All this was being played out against an ongoing war with Spain, and is a reflection of a prevailing xenophobia.

We can only speculate about the identity of these subjects – first called “blackmoores” in the official record and then in in the last proclamation “Negars and Blackamoors.” Other words used to describe black people in early modern England would be “Africans” or “Moor.” As we have seen. The words are underscore the the racial politics of the times: “‘blackamoor’ is sometime substituted for ‘Moor’” and that “‘Moor’” itself is a “multivalent” word, with “its resonances” seemingly “torn between ethnicity and color, especially on the stage.”⁹⁶⁵

In Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (ca. 1594), the mixed-breed off-spring of the Gothic Queen and the Moor Aaron is designated as a “blackamoor” in the stage directions where the darkness of his skin, described as “tawny” as well as black threatens to expose the adulterous queen and Moor. ‘Negars’ was clearer: in travel narratives, the equivalent ‘Negroes’ usually indicated West Africans from the coast of Guinea and Benin, and they were routinely distinguished from the Moors of North Africa. Yet while Elizabeth’s conjunction of “Negars” with “Blackamoors” places an emphasis on color, it does so at the expense of any regional or geographical distinction.⁹⁶⁶

Two African Princes in Shakespeare’s London

During the last decade of the sixteenth century, there was a *sub rosa* trade in slaves going on between Guinea in West Africa and England conducted by privateers that, although

of questionable legality, was not unknown to the Queen. The Portuguese Pretender to the throne, Dom Antonio,⁹⁶⁷ was a guest of the English Crown, and this traffic in African slaves – of which he was a central player – helped defray the considerable cost of the support of his household much to the relief of the Queen’s purse. This was, no doubt, a strong incentive for the queen and her ministers to turn a blind eye.

Anthony Dassell had brought unwelcome attention to this nefarious slaving activity when he captured two young African princes and conveyed them to England against their will, creating tensions with Dom Antonio over politics within the trade. This pitting Dassell against the Dom prompted unwelcome exposure of the whole mess publicly in court in 1592.⁹⁶⁸ It would appear that this court case was the proverbial straw that broke the camels back, and led to the efforts at wholesale banishment of “Negars and Blackamoors” from Her Majesty’s realm. As Gustav Ungerer tells us:

The alleged influx of Guinea slaves in the early 1590s, whether legal or illegal in terms of the Guinea charter of 1588, generated a sense of anxiety about the black presence in late Elizabethan London. The government, therefore, took measures to defuse the situation. In the wake of the investigations conducted by the High Court of Admiralty in 1592-94, the queen under the pretext of a threat to economic stability, was induced to issue the ineffective deportation acts of 1596, 1599, and 1601. It is one of history's ironies that the English government, put under pressure by Dom Antonio's impecunious circumstances, should have condoned the import of Guinea slaves [in the first place].⁹⁶⁹

As for Dassell, when brought before the court he claimed that the young royal Africans had come with him willingly and “he complained to the judges that he was now constrained to keep the two noble Africans in his own house at his great cost for the benefit of the queen and his country.”⁹⁷⁰ Clearly Dassell was required to treat the young African princes as guests in his home due to their elite status based on their standing at home with an African trading partner who needed to be placated. Is it such a stretch to imagine Shakespeare among

the visitors who might have encountered these young nobles while they sojourned with Dassell? Might they have factored into his imagination when he wrote *Othello*?

We know that by 1592 when the princes were living with Dassell Shakespeare has become successful enough as a playwright in London to come under attack of a jealous peer. Playwright Robert Greene famously calls him an "upstart crow" in print for his outsider status as a man from the province who lacked the university-education common to the dramatist scene. This means by 1562 Shakespeare was somewhat of a local celebrity making his impact in popular culture. No doubt he would have been an interesting person to engage with?

But here is the critical information we absolutely can conclude from the Dassell affair and its ramifications. Clearly there were blacks in London during Shakespeare's time and their status ranged from that of a slave to that of a prince. It was literally a very small circumscribed area that housed these black Londoners among whom Shakespeare lived.

Black People at Court and with Courtiers

Clearly, if the African presence was so notable as to cause public alarm, Shakespeare was not writing in a vacuum of direct encounter with black people in his City of London. British Historian James Walvin, who first brought these Elizabethan proclamations to light, points out a certain irony in the Queen's action, "it was Elizabeth's encouragement of the trade with Africa, from which she stood to gain financially, that brought about black immigration."⁹⁷¹ Walvin goes on to point out that the Queen herself had black servants. The Royal Warrant and Wardrobe accounts show expenditures on the Queen's "lyttle Blackamore," perhaps a court entertainer.⁹⁷²

Some of the Queen's "royal favorites,"⁹⁷³ like Robert Dudley (fig. 138).⁹⁷⁴

Her courtiers were not to be outdone. In April 1584, the Duke of Leicester's household records state: 'Gyven in reward the same day by your lordship's commandment to the blackmore Vs' (i.e. five shillings). Was it this man who received the 'mattress given to the blackamore' in March 1583? The following year, on January 5th, the records note: 'Gyven in reward the same day by your lordship's commandment to Mr Rawles blackamoore, XXs'. Sir Robert Cecil had a 'blackmoor seruant'; Sir John Hawkins' black page boy was named Samuel... Sir Francis Drake also had a black manservant. We know a little of his life story. In 1571 Diego, an enslaved man, defected from his Spanish masters during the raid by Drake on the town of Nombre de Dios... Walter Raleigh's page boy, aged about ten, whom he had brought from what is now Guyana, was baptised Charles at St Luke's church in Kensington in 1597. Sidney Lee reported that Raleigh had brought two men back with him; one entered domestic service in London and the other waited on him during the early years of his imprisonment.⁹⁷⁵

Grace Robinson, a black laundress, and John Morocco, a black servant, were among the household staff of Lady Anne Clifford at Knole, some time after 1609.⁹⁷⁶

And consider this. In a painting (fig. 139) by Paul van Somer, signed and dated 1617,

Anne of Denmark stands facing half to the right, wearing a green riding habit and a tall-crowned hat with red plumes. She restrains five greyhounds on a leash in her left hand and rests her right hand on her hip... Her bodice is trimmed with multiple layers of lace at the cuffs and neckline and she wears practical leather riding gloves. A black groom wearing scarlet and gold livery holds her horse to the left...⁹⁷⁷

This is a large oil painting and although it hung in a number of private royal residences over the years it is now on view to the public at Hampton Court. You have to search hard to find it – but it is there. As Queen Anne's portrait with her black groom also reflects, it became a smart thing in the seventeenth century for the aristocracy to be painted with a black attendant attired in rich livery. Anne's hunting portrait is the first example we have of this genre of painting in English art history and much earlier than art historian Peter Erickson has set the date.⁹⁷⁸ Clearly she was a trendsetter. Therefore, is it any wonder that the first recorded performance of *Othello* was presented at the new Stuart Court?

It is apparent, as sociologist Cedric Robinson maintains, that the evidence, although

“circumstantial is substantial” that Anne was “directly influential in the short-lived salvation of blackness from the accelerating processes of the inferiorization trope” that took hold in Elizabethan England.⁹⁷⁹

Things changed dramatically later in the seventeenth century and the stereotypic perception of blacks as base and inferior was irrevocably and generally revived. Reifying the pre-existence of color-coded prejudice in Europe that touched had earlier touched England, pre-dating England’s becoming a major player in the trans-Atlantic African slave trade. But this earlier exclusively English window of relative open-mindedness and fascination with the Other fostered by Queen Anne as queen had been extensive enough to bring us *Othello*.

Ironically, it was James’ and Anne’s grandsons, King Charles II, restored to the monarchy after the Puritan Interregnum in 1660, and especially Charles’ younger brother James, Duke of York, who inaugurated the new breed of English slavers. The old breed is embodied in a single person, for Sir John Hawkins (fig. 140), the second son of the first Englishman known to make expeditions to Africa in the 1530s, has very little company. Like most prominent merchants of the Elizabethan period, John Hawkins engaged in both legitimate trade and piracy (fig. 141). But Sir John is famously on record for being one to traffic in contraband cargoes of slaves in Portuguese West Africa and sell them in the Caribbean in defiance of the Spanish before England was legally or officially involved. In truth, he was an infrequent slaver. And it is even speculated that Hawkins’ cousin, Sir Francis Drake, (fig. 142) sailed with him on his second slaving voyage of 1564-65.⁹⁸⁰ Being a slave trader did not come with the moral stigma it came to acquire. So it is not so unexpected that given the opportunity in 1663, Charles II, issued a patent to trade in slaves to the Company of Royal Adventurers slaves, led by his brother. By now the Portugal and Spain were out of the

slave-trading picture and England had only to vie with Holland for the Atlantic monopoly.⁹⁸¹

Cedric Robinson decries what happened next, “the cultural manufacture of the Negro...the inferiorized Black... from the commercial materialities of slavery trumped the earlier and more diverse significations of blackness.” Degrading Africans was done consciously and deliberately in order to expressly justify their exploitation for economic and political ends.⁹⁸² And he cautions us to remember: “Change is the nature of historical occurrences and we must constantly remind ourselves that the Negro is an historical conceit.”⁹⁸³ Embedded in this historical conceit is a derogation of the Negro’s physiognomy identified with dark skin, kinky hair, thick lips, a flat nose and prominent brow and chin cast in comparative opposition to white aesthetic standards of beauty.⁹⁸⁴

Drake distinguishes these so-identified, undesirable characteristics as “negroidness”, which translates also into “cognitive deficit” as separate from blackness (on this see also depiction of blackness in Drake Jewel, (fig. 143, fig. 144).⁹⁸⁵ Othello exists in Shakespeare’s fasion of him in opposition to the Negro’s standard historical construction, “an inferior animal-like breed of mankind unfit to be treated as equals” that Iago, Othello’s white figurative assassin, gives full-throated voice to. That is why it is impossible to claim, as many critics would have it, that *Othello* is NOT a play about race when Othello’s is clearly a radical, oppositional figure.

The Scottish Connection

We know there was a tradition of black musicians (fig. 145)⁹⁸⁶ at Tudor and Stuart Courts. Queen Elizabeth and her successor, James I, enjoyed the arts, they both also invited Shakespeare's and his cohorts play at Court, perhaps he knew some of these fellow performers. Performing Africans and performing blackness was a remarkable theme of James' style.

At his wedding to Anne, then princess of Denmark, James arranged an entertainment for his Oslo hosts: "by his orders four young Negroes danced naked in the snow in front of the royal carriage, [remember *Tamburlaine?*], but the cold was so intense that they died a little later of pneumonia."⁹⁸⁷

Moreover, there are records of Africans performing at the court of this king's grandfather, James IV of Scotland.⁹⁸⁸ In 1505, the Scottish King "scandalized society by setting up a black woman as the Queen of Beauty and himself as the 'wild knight' who defended her."⁹⁸⁹ In her introductory essay to *Women and Race and Early Modern Texts*, Joyce Green MacDonald, fittingly, takes up this curious episode from the perspective of telling us something about "the beauty queen." What MacDonald reveals to her reader is that the true Queen of Scotland, Margaret (sister to Henry VIII), had two "African maidservants." One of them was named "Elen More," and Elen might very well have played the role of Queen for a Day.⁹⁹⁰ Elen and her fellow Africans in Scotland were most likely spoils from "James' privateers in raids on Portuguese shipping."⁹⁹¹ The Portuguese began their Atlantic trade in slaves in the 1440s, so it is quite interesting that early in this trade there was already some impact on Northern European countries.

The Black Trumpeter

The most precious treasure of the College of Arms, the painted roll depicting the 1511 Westminster Tournament to honor the birth of a son to Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, features a handsome black trumpeter astride a grey horse with a black harness (fig. 146, fig. 147).⁹⁹² In the accounts of the treasurer of the Chamber, the royal officer who paid the King's musicians their wages, there are references to John Blanke, the 'blacke trumpet.' It is pretty certain that the black man who is twice portrayed in the painted roll is John Blanke.⁹⁹³

Some speculate that Blanke came to the court of Henry VIII from the court of his Scottish brother-in-law, James IV⁹⁹⁴ who was known to have had several black members of his household.⁹⁹⁵ Also, it is possible to speculate that Henry's trumpeter arrived from Spain with Catherine of Aragon's bridal entourage in 1501.⁹⁹⁶

Most blacks were not as privileged as the King Henry's trumpeter; most people of African descent in England were in domestic service. A black serving class was well integrated into the London social fabric by Shakespeare's death in 1616. The records in general are very paltry about this early modern Afro-British community, where most people lived in the margins. In a period not known for its abundance of records to begin with, the royal proclamations and the Tournament role are exceptional finds. But because black people have been written out of the subsequent historical record it is worth mining every clue we have.⁹⁹⁷ "We are in search of facts but we listen also to the whispers," so Charles Nicholls reminds us when we look for clues of any kind in sixteenth century England.⁹⁹⁸ Many of the personal histories – particularly those of black domestic servants – are destined to remain invisible.

The invisibility of the serving class Gustav Ungerer sees as much “a matter of social status rather than of color or ethnicity” – for white people in service were also “stripped of a history of their own.” They are all collectively part of the great unseen, which is why blacks were so infrequently commented upon.⁹⁹⁹

Xenophobia and Loving the Other

In the few paragraphs James Sharpe devotes to the presence of blacks in England in his very popular standard text, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760* (2004), he identifies a dominant trait of Tudor and Stuart society, a nationalistic virulent “xenophobia,” as the key to the study of early modern black/white relations. Sharpe portrays the English as a nation frightened and distrustful of people unlike themselves, who find foreign cultures strange and of-putting.¹⁰⁰⁰ Nigel Goose agrees that “a sense of national identity, even national pride, existed among Englishmen.” But he argues for acknowledging that these views were not monolithic. He sees that “national pride could sit side-by-side with tolerance of foreigners, and respect and admiration for their achievements, even if this was frequently muddied by long-standing enmity, religious difference and economic rivalry.” But Goose also acknowledges that it was “the lowest social groups in early modern England, just as today, who appear to have exhibited anti-alien sentiments.”¹⁰⁰¹

The Queen’s proclamations were clearly designed to placate potentially rebellious lower orders. These attitudes influenced the earliest English encounter with Africa and Africans. Folarin Shyllon emphatically hits the mark that “racism has been the British way of life ever since the first blacks settled in Britain.”¹⁰⁰²

That being said, some Elizabethans clearly overcame their antipathy. And interracial marriage was even looked upon as something not so alarming – if curious. We have George Best’s 1578 description of just such an early modern union to provide this evidence.¹⁰⁰³

I myself have seen an Ethiopian as black as coal brought into England, who taking a fair English woman to wife, begat a son in all respects as black as the father was, although England were his native country, and an English woman his mother: whereby it seemeth this blackness proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man, which was so strong, that neither the nature of the clime, neither the good complexion of the mother concurring, could anything alter, and therefore we cannot impute it to the nature of the clime.

As we can see, Best, explorer and Hakluyt chronicler, was most interested in the appearance of the child born of this marriage. What is most actually is his interest in offering up a theory that accounts for the African’s color and the transmission of those traits. Best offers a fascinating take on informal theories of race in Tudor England.

From their first encounter with Africans in the sixteenth century,¹⁰⁰⁴ the English were obsessed with the African’s skin color and speculated much on the cause and the nature of its blackness. The prevailing notion at the time - passed down from the ancient Greeks – was that the African’s blackness was a matter of climate (Best’s “clime”): that living in a region scorched by the heat of the sun, that their skin became burnt over time.¹⁰⁰⁵ This notion fell apart when in the temperate climate of England, the African’s skin did not lighten after several generations out of the tropical sun as Best points out. George Best brashly asserted - based upon this observation - that the condition of blackness must “proceedeth from a natural infection.” Best’s speculation is notable as the earliest hypothesis in English culture that imagines skin color to be based inherently in the body itself.¹⁰⁰⁶

It has always surprised me that Best’s hypothesizing on the causation of blackness in African has not been called attention to when the discussion of racial theory as applied to the

early modern period comes up. As you will recall from Part One of this study I argued that Shakespeare referenced the so-called climate theory in the speeches of the Prince of Morocco in the *Merchant of Venice*. George Best's account also by default raises the issues of miscegenation that soon vexed the English when interracial relations became socially taboo in England. But in Shakespeare's day there was a certain degree of tolerance – but for many – although legal, race mixing was undesirable.

We have a number of documented examples of what would be considered the abrogation of normative English cultural sexual proscriptions between blacks and whites. Illicit sex crept into the – so-called – best of homes. Marmaduke Langdale, High Sheriff of Yorkshire, for example, accused his wife in Court of Star Chamber of the act of adulterous fornication with his servant “Pedro the Blackamoor.”¹⁰⁰⁷ And certainly any sexual prohibitions between blacks and whites were repeatedly violated in the London “stews” or brothels.¹⁰⁰⁸ “Thus in 1577, Jane Thompson, obviously a prostitute, was detained in Bridewell for committing “whoredome” with “Anthonye, a blackamore;” and Rose Brown for admitting “dyvers & many blackamores” as customers to her establishment; and Margery Williams confessed to the governors that she had sexual intercourse with Peter Peringoe, a “blackamore.” In 1604, the governors issued a warrant to arrest a London hatmaker “whoe had gott the blacke more with child.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Shakespeare's Dark Lady

One of the great scholarly debates, still unresolved after four-hundred years, is the identity of Shakespeare's "mistress," commonly referred to as "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets." It is by now a less-fashionable concern in scholarly circles,¹⁰¹⁰ even though our options have been expanded with the new evidence of a bona fide black presence in Shakespeare's world. The problem with this line of inquiry is that it is all about Shakespeare, and not about a woman who lived in his time. The Dark Lady is person in her own right, not just a footnote of Shakespeare marginalia. Yes, she is anonymous; but the content of the Sonnets that reference her indicate that she was, indeed, a real person.

The assumption that Shakespeare was in love with a black woman, although obvious is, however, still in much dispute. This comes from what Kim F. Hall identifies as the standard scholarly position that Shakespeare's "Dark Lady" sonnets are allegorical rather than referential.¹⁰¹¹ With scholars arguing that there was no black presence in Tudor and Early Stuart London, it closed any possible debate. That is until a woman identified as black in skin color emerged as a candidate for The Dark Lady. In his extremely popular and influential biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004), Stephen Greenblatt revives a long buried theory – speculating on one of the great scholarly debates that has not been resolved after 400 years, the identity of Shakespeare's "mistress." For all these years the Dark Lady has remained white and abstract in the eyes of critics even though from the content of the Sonnets it would appear to be obvious from that the object of his affection is a woman of African descent. The opening lines of Sonnet 130 are particularly convincing in this regard.

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red,
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,¹⁰¹²
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head...*

– Fragment: Sonnet 130, William Shakespeare

Greenblatt re-introduces an oft-discredited candidate by name, Lucy Negro,¹⁰¹³ a prostitute as Shakespeare's putative lover. But it is important to consider the cultural context within which of these earliest of engagements between Africans and Britons: "Sixteenth century Britain had neither the intellectual inheritance nor a body of experience based on contact to prepare it for intimate relations with Africans."¹⁰¹⁴

What do we know of Lucy Negro? She, apparently, was a quite familiar black courtesan in London's Clerkenwell stews¹⁰¹⁵ who "appeared at the Gray's Inn Christmas Revels in 1594."¹⁰¹⁶ George Begshaw Harrison was actually the first scholar to make this connection with a surviving play script of the Gray's Inn (fig. 148) festivities. Based on this, in 1933, he identified Lucy Negro as the putative Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets in his book *Shakespeare under Elizabeth*.¹⁰¹⁷

During the 1594 Gray's Inn Christmas revels the Queen was in attendance. So was a black courtesan, Lucy Negro, we now know because she appears by name as a participant in the masque the queen saw performed.

The gentlemen of Gray's Inn, with whom the maiden monarch was a great favourite, got up a burlesque masque, called the Prince of Purpoole, for her amusement, with great pains and cost, which was played before her on Shrove Tuesday, 1594, at which time, she and all her court honoured the performance with her presence.¹⁰¹⁸

William Shakespeare, who was known to the gentlemen of Gray's Inn might also have attended.¹⁰¹⁹

In 1688, the text of the 1594 festivities was published in the *Gesta Grayorum*. It was based on a manuscript of the evenings entertainment passed down by the law students all those many years ago. The play was a satire within which The Prince of Purpoole, a so-called “Lord of Misrule” represents the festival fool as “jovial ring-leader and mischief-maker.”¹⁰²⁰ One of the students, Henry Helmes, was crowned for the occasion to play the part. A featured *reality* performer, not someone just playing a part, was the “Abbess of Clerkenwell,” a woman named Lucy Negro. From the text:

Lucy Negro, Abbess de Clerkenwell, holdeth the Nunnery of Clerkenwell, with the Lands and Privileges thereunto belonging, of the Prince of Purpoole by Night-Service *in Cauda*, and to find a choir of Nuns, with burning Lamps, to chaunt, *Placebo* to the gentlemen of the Prince’s Privy-Chamber, on the day of his Excellency’s coronation.¹⁰²¹

Duncan Salkeld points out that the “irony of the *Gesta Grayorum*” turns on the “allusion” to a passage in John Stow’s *Survey of London* (1604) cryptically confirming that “there had been a priory of black nuns at Clerkenwell since the beginning of the twelfth century, Lucy Negro was, in fact, a brothel madam, and her choir with burning lamps [i.e. a reference to the pox] were prostitutes.”¹⁰²²

After G. B. Harrison introduced Lucy Negro as the putative Dark Lady in 1933 it would be thirty years before Lucy Negro is again brought up in print. John Leslie Hotson, in *Mr. W.H.* (1964), put forward a theory that, while not denying the existence of Lucy Negro, strips her of her Dark Lady status.¹⁰²³ His substitute candidate is a woman named Lucy Morgan or “Black Luce.” Writing thirty-plus years later still, Duncan Salkeld, in his article “Black Luce and the ‘curtizans’ of Shakespeare’s London” (2000), sets out to debunk both Hotson’s and Harrison’s Dark Lady identity theories. Salkeld writes: “It is not my intention to present in this article a ‘revealed at last’ solution to the Dark Lady puzzle... Quite the reverse,

I shall be confined to showing that, whoever the Dark Mistress was, she was not Black Luce, and that whoever Black Luce was, she was not Luce Morgan.”¹⁰²⁴

But Salkeld only manages to identify who Lucy Negro is *not*. Imtiaz Habib brings a point of view – steeped in orthodox post-colonial theory that is nearly impenetrable – to his look at Shakespeare and the Dark Lady in *Shakespeare and Race* (2000). He makes the case for a subaltern Dark Lady, but he makes no serious conjecture as to whom, specifically, she might be.¹⁰²⁵ We do know from documentary evidence that at least one black prostitute was living on Turnbull Street in 1602. A record that was also uncovered by Harrison.

It is a letter dated 1602 from one Denis Edwards addressed to Thomas Lankford, secretary to the Earl of Hertford or Mr. Cross, Clerk of the Kitchen. Here is what Edwards writes: “Pray enquire after and secure my negress; she is certainly at the “Swan,” a Dane's beershop, Turnbull Street,¹⁰²⁶ Clerkenwell.”¹⁰²⁷ Was this woman the courtesan Lucy Negro. Of the Gray's Inn Christmas masque of 1594? It is impossible to know. But the presence of this “negress” on Turnbull Street who trades in sexual favors during the period Shakespeare was living with the Mountjoys on Silver Street and writing *Othello* is just a momentous fact to consider. It is an even more momentous fact if she is not Lucy Negro, because then we have evidence of *two* Clerkenwell black sex workers as neighbors to Shakespeare.

That G.B. Harrison brought forth the records of potentially two women of African descent living in Shakespeare's London, but a least one, *over eighty years ago* should be shameful to scholars who have protested these many years that Shakespeare could not have written about black people from personal experience because he knew no black people. The possibility for encounter most certainly existed.

Turnbull Street was a well-known “Love Lane” just up the road through Smithfield Market from Shakespeare’s lodgings on Silver Street; “always in London you were not far from the more pungent life of the city.”¹⁰²⁸ In *The Lodger*, Charles Nicholl examines the world of prostitution in Shakespeare’s time, world in which Shakespeare was implicated. It is commonly known that “prostitution and the theatre were closely associated.” “The theatre of Shakespeare’s day,” he tells us “was part of London’s vast entertainment industry, and the playhouses stood amid other venues of leisure and pleasure – baiting – rings and cock – pits, bowling-alleys and dicing houses, taverns and brothels.”¹⁰²⁹ George Wilkins – one of Shakespeare’s colleagues, if not his friend - operated a tavern on the corner of Cow Cross and, yes, Turnbull Street, it was an infamous bawdy house. Wilkins also had a somewhat chequered career as a playwright. He was Shakespeare’s collaborator on *Pericles*.

Shakespeare’s writing-partner-*cum*-pimp was known for acts of violence against women. He was notorious for punching and kicking his whores. Wilkins even put his own wife out to solicit clients on the streets. In his own write, Wilkins penned a very popular play for Shakespeare's company, fittingly entitled, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*.¹⁰³⁰ As Nicholl writes: “Wilkins also represents a world that Shakespeare depicted in *Measure for Measure*, in which the ‘lowlife’ scenes reek of London in 1604. The brothel scenes in *Pericles* are also pertinent”. Nicholl goes so far as to identify “‘Silver Street plays,’ including *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Lear*, that are redolent with the milieu.” He therefore concludes, “When Shakespeare described brothels and pimps, he knew of what he wrote. There were anecdotes concerning his lubriciousness, and there is little reason to doubt that he took full advantage of the looseness of the theatrical demi-monde.”¹⁰³¹

Taking all this into consideration, it does not seem so improbable that a courtesan should be Shakespeare's Dark Lady as G. B. Harrison first speculated so long ago.

Tudor and Early Stuart Black London

*From looking at how Londoners located themselves and others within the metropolis, one might ask what effect the city had on individuals and their social relationships. The city is often spoken of in terms of the opportunities that it offered for anonymity, for people to be free-floating private individuals, creating their own identities free from the restrictions of birth and background. Yet researchers of Boulton, Shoemaker, Gowing and Harding present us with other images, of tightly focused, even claustrophobic local communities.*¹⁰³²

– J. F. Merritt, editor, *Imaging Early Modern London*, (2001)

If, like Shakespeare, you lived in the square mile or so that is the city of London it should be evident by now that encountering a black person – potentially a prostitute – was not so rare. While it is hard to come by exact figures, one estimate has it that by 1605 there were 75,000 people living in the City proper while 115,000 lived in the surrounding “Liberties,” the inner suburbs where City writ did not apply.¹⁰³³ Ania Loomba tells us that in terms of counting actual foreigners “non-English Europeans as well as Africans and Jews” living in London “numbered about 10,000 people by the time Shakespeare wrote” *Othello* in 1604.”¹⁰³⁴ There was even a visible presence of American Indians in Shakespeare's London, enough so, that the playwright ironically quips through one of his characters “even a dead Indian attracted an audience,” alluding to early practices of anthropological and ethnographic display.¹⁰³⁵ But how many of London's foreigners were of African descent? Gustav Ungerer offers this:

The majority of the Africans were black domestic slaves, a few were freedmen, and some of them were Moors, mostly Berbers from North Africa. The contemporary blanket term for them all was blackamoor. The seeming absence of records documenting their presence would argue the case for the existence of a negligible number of colored servants. On second thoughts, however, the marginalized African population must have assumed a sizable volume, conspicuous and large enough to be of concern to the government, which thought it opportune to take countermeasures...¹⁰³⁶

D.W. Meinig adds this sobering statistic:

By 1600, it is estimated, about 275,000 Africans had been sold into slavery within the European-dominated Atlantic world. Nearly 50,000 of these had gone to Europe itself.¹⁰³⁷

Clearly, Shakespeare and his contemporaries were not writing in a vacuum of direct knowledge and experience of people of African. Again Ungerer:

A good many misconceptions about the black and colored population in early modern England are due to the fact that the issue of the black presence has not yet overcome the difficulties and misconceptions of a nascent discipline. Thus the majority of the African servants were not curiosities, neither were they oddities nor status symbols, as some scholars would make us believe. On the contrary, they were like their cousins in Spain and Portugal hardworking domestic servants whom, to put it in Shylock's terms, the Venetian (English) owners would 'use in abject and in slavish parts.'¹⁰³⁸

That there was a population in England of Africans and people of African descent is not surprising considering this sobering statistic: By 1600, it is estimated about 275,000 Africans had been sold into slavery, mostly by the Portuguese, and within the European-dominated Atlantic world. Nearly 50,000 of these Africans had ended up in Europe itself, predominately in Spain and Portugal.¹⁰³⁹ How many of these slaves of this African Diaspora were also in service in Tudor England? The answer is complicated. From the sixteenth century, the employment of Africans and became increasingly common in England. Wealthy - and not so wealthy - people in the kingdom might have one or two black servants, footmen or musicians. Yet in that same period nearly forty per cent of the English population was in

service to others.¹⁰⁴⁰

No doubt the overwhelming majority of black people ended up in service, as they entered a rigidly stratified English social class system as cultural and social outsiders. With Africans, the nature of the bond with an employer might be legally vague, especially if they had once been enslaved. The status of “negroes” in Britain in the sixteenth century – when they first constitute and identifiable segment of the population – reflects an anomaly in English society do to the prevailing attitudes towards slavery as taboo. An *inverse exceptionalism* would be the case for blacks in Britain, who, well into the next centuries, lived enslaved in a society that professed itself slave-averse if not slave-free. Kenneth Little, the first social scientist to write about race relations in the sixteenth century England, suggests that from the very beginning blacks were essentialized as different – legally invisible, existing in the borderlands outside the law: “Possibly the legality of the slave status of the Negro was taken for granted rather than condoned”¹⁰⁴¹ – even though slavery was “contrary to the laws of England.”¹⁰⁴² This is also why these individuals are so hard to track.

There was, indeed, a great difference between the sales of black slaves in late medieval and early modern England and the sales in the Iberian Peninsula. While sales became an institutionalized custom in Portugal and Spain, where slaves were sold as mere chattels, as “things,” at public auctions and often at cattle markets like livestock, the sales in Tudor England seem to have been made on a much smaller scale and on a private basis.¹⁰⁴³

The Public Record of Black People in London

In the parish of All Hallows Barking, Tower Ward, London, where she dwelt, Widow Stokes paid an annual per capita tax of 8d for her servant “Clare, a Negra” – both in October 1598 and in 1599. In the same parish, Richard Woods, the owner of Mary, paid the same tax.

So did Oliver Skinner, the owner of Maria.¹⁰⁴⁴ Not long ago, all we had were tantalizing tidbits of data like these to document the presence of London's black population.

The house Shakespeare lived in as a lodger with its "foreign" occupants was in a culturally diverse neighborhood of the City near Aldgate (fig. 149).¹⁰⁴⁵ We now have records (see for example fig. 150) of many people of African descent living within a ten to fifteen-minute walk of Shakespeare's Silver Street home.¹⁰⁴⁶ So it is safe to conclude that Shakespeare lived with black people among his neighbors.

The Parish Registers

Thanks to a project started by the Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section, Guildhall Library Aldermanbury, and now with London Metropolitan Archives, scholars have access to online records listing hundreds of black and people discovered in the Parish register entries from the churches of London since the records were first initiated in the time of Henry VIII. I am presenting this data here to provide the reader with the experience of knowing all that they can about the people who comprise this database. That is because this is only way to humanize – to personalize what little there is to know.

The entries are presented at the end of this chapter as an Appendix in date order. But I have reordered them by parish, and added the information about the churches. The Library has added punctuation "for clarity, and the use of capitals has been modernised," but the original spellings have been retained. A few entries from non-City registers at Guildhall Library have been added in a separate section at the end. A list of entries from sources other than the parish registers can also be found at the end."¹⁰⁴⁷ I do this in the spirit of collective

biography or prosopography to reclaim the power of the individual in the communal.

Everyone of these churches was known to Shakespeare. Everyone of these black parishioners could have been known to him. They were part of the fabric of his everyday world.

It is very touching to read through this record of forgotten lives lived in the interstices of social and political recognition. What stands out as well in analysis is the number of these churches – once essential in peoples lives – that were destroyed in the Great Fire of London. “The Mortality Bill for the year 1665, published by the Parish Clerk’s Company, shows 97 parishes within the City of London.” By the following year “September 6th the city lay in ruins, 86 churches having been destroyed. In 1670 a Rebuilding Act was passed and a committee set up under the stewardship of Sir Christopher Wren to decide which would be rebuilt. Fifty-one were chosen.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Under the circumstances, it is astonishing that so many records survive – but many do not.¹⁰⁴⁹ That we have any organized parish records at all is because of the Reformation. “The Church of England was the government-sponsored and predominant religion to which the vast majority of England's populace belonged. Created in 1536, after King Henry VIII severed all ties to the church in Rome, he directed that each local parish be responsible to register all marriages, baptisms and burials.”¹⁰⁵⁰

Among the parish nearly 500 records of individual black people in Tudor and Stuart London a few things stand out. First of all, nearly all of these subjects seem to have been in service or indigent, several many having died on the street. Dying in the parish did not necessarily mean living in the parish.¹⁰⁵¹ Most only have one name. And women as owners or mistresses appear rather frequently. These early modern black Londoners dwelled in the households of the very rich and the middling folk alike. Also variant spellings of negro and blackamoor are used to describe the people in the records. It is interesting to note, that

identifying people who were Other, that is not white, was an important signifier or marker of identity to the record keepers.

These records are interesting as variations on interracial romantic and sexual relationships. The notion that a “negro child can be “white” is a fascinating *tertium quid*. A topic that Shakespeare addresses in *Titus Andronicus*. We have Aaron the Moor begetting a black baby with the Roman Emperors wife and we have his black countryman with his white wife begetting a white child – clearly demonstrating the belief that both are possible. Aaron’s plan is to switch the infants to hide the act of adultery.

AARON. *Not far, one Muli lives, my countryman;
His wife but yesternight was brought to bed;
His child is like to her, fair as you are:
Go pack with him, and give the mother gold,
And tell them both the circumstance of all;
And how by this their child shall be advanced,
And be received for the emperor's heir,
And substituted in the place of mine,
To calm this tempest whirling in the court;
And let the emperor dandle him for his own.*

– Titus Andronicus, Act 4, Scene 2

European Immigration to London

London was experiencing a significant wave of overseas migration during Shakespeare's playwriting career in the capital, bringing the City a much greater diversity of population of which people of African descent were a part. The last half on the sixteenth century brought the "first major wave of refugees to England." A multigenerational influx from the Netherlands – the Dutch and Walloons (French speakers) – began in the 1560s "that had far-reaching impact on the culture and society." This emigration slowed after 1585.¹⁰⁵² During "decades of turmoil" religious refugees poured into London out of France. These were the French Huguenots, like Shakespeare's, landlord, Christopher Mountjoy. "They came in the wake of terrible events, most notoriously the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 1572."¹⁰⁵³ As we have seen earlier, the influx of West Africans increased in the 1590s. But John Hawkins had landed as many as 300 Africans slaves in England, commandeered from the Portuguese in the 1560s.¹⁰⁵⁴ Often the significance of this first wave of European foreign immigration gets lost in historians preoccupation with the one that came after in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁵⁵ All too often the African migration gets lost altogether.

Overseas immigrants to England in sixteenth the century, i.e., *aliens* or *strangers* as they were called – were subject to a unique legal status based on "barriers" in "the common law and civic laws and customs."¹⁰⁵⁶ Foreigners faced discrimination and circumscribed social advancement, and it was very hard for them if they could not mitigate their status. Even one hundred immigrant families in one precinct of the city could stir resentment and anxiety:¹⁰⁵⁷ Nicholl "Pigs and Frenchmen speak one language: awee aweel!" was a popular joke, but Spanish, Dutch and Italians were all the butt of the joke, and of games far more

hurtful.¹⁰⁵⁸

In his study of xenophobia on the Renaissance stage, A. J. Hoenselaars categorizes a group of anti-alien plays inspired by the massive influx of foreigners into the London marketplace at the close of the century ... As Hoenselaars explains, the aping of foreign accents on stage mirrors the Babel-like confusion in the marketplace beyond the walls of the theater. Through parody and imitation, the anxieties of domestic economic competition are exorcised. The growing number of foreigners not only increased economic competition, but it also raised the possibility of miscegenation with others of foreign nations whose otherness is expressed as a function of foreign vernaculars.¹⁰⁵⁹

Allegiance to the monarch and place of birth were the “key criteri[a]” distinguishing a subject of the realm from a stranger.¹⁰⁶⁰ Alien “friends” of the realm could take an oath of allegiance, after which, theoretically, the law protected them. Nonetheless, these strangers’ rights were seriously abrogated when compared to the native-born citizenry. For example, they were not allowed to own real property, inherit it, or bequeath. Aliens had no political rights: They could neither vote nor hold office. Even the second generation was denied access to citizenship. “An alien could become an adopted subject, a denizen, with the acquisition of a letter patent” from the Crown, for which a fee was paid. Fewer people took advantage of this option than were eligible because it was a cumbersome and expensive process.¹⁰⁶¹ In Elizabethan times, this kind of patent letter granted permanent residency and protection from expulsion. An “act of ‘denization’” was an act of “naturalization.”¹⁰⁶² Still, denizens could not inherit real property or transfer their denizen status to their offspring, unless specifically so stipulated in the patent letter.¹⁰⁶³

An act of parliament could create a naturalized subject upon whom the entire nation

had conferred citizenship. This special status could remove the obstacle to the rights of inheritance.¹⁰⁶⁴ A privileged few purchased an honorific that was called “the freedom of the City from the appropriate authorities.” These “free denizens” had near full citizenship rights. During the last quarter of in the century, this option dried up as overpopulation taxed the social fabric of the City when job opportunities declined due to foreign trade embargoes and a disruption in the cloth trade. In 1604, it was decided – after much debate – that children of aliens born in Britain were denizens, not natural born subjects. Restrictions on apprenticeship for the second generation, native born persisted as well.¹⁰⁶⁵ In the Elizabethan era – because of a widespread perception that the country was overpopulated – there was never a serious debate on the neutralization of aliens in the realm.¹⁰⁶⁶

In London, there was regular tension between the native-born population and the alien population over economic issues and social concerns. The strangers in the realm were charged with “taking away Englishmen’s trade, exporting coin, employing only their own countrymen, refusing to share their secrets, keeping themselves too much apart, producing inferior goods, increasing the risk of plague by overcrowded living, and even of conspiring against the state.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Some of this was applied to “English strangers” – people coming to the City from the countryside. --were especially worrying. The established town folk did not want the country opportunists, like Shakespeare, that “upstart crow,” unsettling the status quo.¹⁰⁶⁸ Some strangers in the realm were merchants who kept holdings abroad. Some were refugees and “destitute.” Efforts were made so the alien artisans in London would sell only to retailers and not directly to the public. So they would not be competition for the guild and liveries.¹⁰⁶⁹

A Privileged Émigré Class

No question some foreigners were preferred above others. “Cecil’s remark in the Commons in 1593 that that it is ‘a matter of Charity to relieve Strangers, and especially such as do not grieve our eyes’,” is perceived by Nigel Goose to be a reference to the “Negars and Blackamoors” whose presence prompted the now infamous trifecta of proclamations.¹⁰⁷⁰

The Dutch and the French immigrants to England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, fell well within the bounds of acceptability. They were settled members of civil societies who conformed themselves to the rule of law, they were white Europeans, they were Christians and – decisively- Protestants who had fled for their consciences’ sake. Although toleration was also extended to foreign Catholics, the fact that the Dutch and French refugees were co-religionists was clearly crucial, without which the existence of such large alien populations in England would have been impossible to contemplate.¹⁰⁷¹

The Dutch Church and the French Church, respectively, each brought their populations together, providing services in the native language, a social community of identity support, and the comfort of the familiar.¹⁰⁷²

Dr. Nunez and the Portuguese ‘converso’ Community

It is worth examining extensively the unique status of Portuguese *converso* immigrants to the City of London because of their special relationship with the black population.¹⁰⁷³ Jews who had long since banished from England (1260) were another invisible minority, because there were, in fact, Jews still living in London at the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁷⁴ Edmund Valentine Campos makes an important intercultural comparison that relates English racial attitudes with respect to Jews and blacks to deeply ingrained anti-Irish sentiment.

The case of Ireland is an example of racism rooted in national and cultural differences rather than phenotypic or religious ones, and it is helpful for understanding Elizabethan attitudes towards Jews since, unlike the Moor, the Jew can “pass” as a white European. National origin, then, plays a large role in anti-Semitic racism since the Jews most likely to be encountered in England were Iberian refugees. Hence, I would argue that some aspects of English anti-Semitism can be interpreted as transposed anti-Hispanic racism.¹⁰⁷⁵

James Shapiro, author of *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996), points out an all too frequent truism about the so-perceived outsider. “Jews provide unusual insight into the cultural anxieties felt by English men and women at a time when their nation was experiencing extraordinary social and religious and political turbulence.”¹⁰⁷⁶ And further: “When Jews were caught breaking the law in Tudor and Stuart England, their Jewishness could become a matter of public notice.”¹⁰⁷⁷

It is ironic then, as Gustav Ungerer points out: “The most experienced slaveholders in early modern England were the Portuguese New Christians or conversos who sought refuge in English ports when in 1536 Portugal, under Spanish pressure, established an Inquisition of its own and instituted the purity of blood statutes.” It is worth quoting Ungerer extensively on this.

The community of the Portuguese conversos reached its peak in the last decades of queen Elizabeth's reign when it numbered between eighty and ninety members. Their presence was most welcome in England because of their widespread international commercial networks, their inveterate disapproval of Spain's annexation of Portugal in 1580, and their unanimous backing of Dom Antonio's cause. Their impressive performances won them much acclaim among the English circles of power and secured them long-lasting government backing and many a special privilege, the most important being the tacit acceptance by the English authorities of their commitment to rejudaization.

The dominant converso families maintained their old elite lifestyle in their new English environment. The ingrained legacy of their self-image as prominent bankers, merchants, ship owners, physicians, diplomats, and court astronomers stood them in good stead when they struggled to pursue their old careers in England. The way of life led by the wealthy Portuguese conversos, whether they settled in London, Amsterdam,

or Antwerp, required running large households, staffed by native and foreign male and female servants. The foreign domestic personnel of the Portuguese merchants of Antwerp were mostly black African servants. Their presence in Jewish Antwerp households is rather well documented; as for London converso households it is, unfortunately, poorly documented.

Ungerer continues:

Dr. Hector Nunes (1520-91) scored an unparalleled success as one of the most prominent multi-career Portuguese conversos to opt for exile in England. He was a renowned court physician, an enterprising merchant, shipowner, marine insurance broker, intelligencer, and banker who supported the cause of Dom Antonio, the pretender to the Portuguese throne. He was monitoring anti-Spanish resistance from his exile in England, besides being secretary Walsingham's accredited negotiator in putting out secret peace feelers in 1585/86 in order to assess the mounting preparations made for the sailing of the Spanish Armada. As head of the Portuguese community in London, he was running a syndicate of converso merchants linked by close family ties. Their policy was to pioneer commercial relations with the Mediterranean countries, Morocco included. He and his partners were among the first to import Moroccan sugar, molasses, paneles (brown unpurified sugar), and rameals (inferior sugar), via Antwerp in ships flying the Moroccan flag in the late 1560s. In March 1571, he and his partner William Curtis invested money in a voyage to Guinea, obviously with an eye on seizing slaves ...and two black female domestics, Gratia and Elizabeth Anegro. Gratia died a young woman; she was buried in the parish of St Olave Hart Street on July 13, 1590.¹⁰⁷⁸

I have already introduced “Gratia” as “Grace” the St Olave Hart Street parish records.

The slaves who came to London in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese *conversos* were part of a slave trade in Africans that had begun well over one hundred years before.

***Dr. Nunes and His Reluctant Slave*¹⁰⁷⁹**

Here is an example of the liminal status of slaves in Elizabeth's London. Ungerer tells us that “[a]s a slaveholder the distinguished physician was surprisingly out of touch with the legal realities in Tudor England. After having spent some forty years in England, Dr. Nunes assumed that there were laws regulating the slave traffic as there had been in his native

Portugal.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Let us proceed with Ungerer and the rest of the story:

Thus, in 1587, he submitted a formal complaint to the Court of Requests, stating that he had bought an Ethiopian, meaning a black African, from an English mariner at a price of [pounds sterling]4 10s. The slave, however, “vtterly” refused “to tarry and serve him.” Dr Nunes apparently made the painful experience that he had “not any ordinarye remedie at and by the course of the comon Lawes” unless the queen through her secretaries in the Court of Requests would “compell the sayde Ethiopian to serve him during his liffe.” Should the court refuse to oblige the African to serve him, he requested the court to “Recover this sayd ffowre poundes Tenne shillinges” from the English mariner who had sold him the slave.

This case confirms that owing to the absence of a black slave's legal status in early modern England the law courts and even the secretaries of state in the Court of Requests, some of whom were personally acquainted with Dr. Nunes, had no authority to intervene. The conclusion of Rosalyn L. Knutson, who has unearthed the document, that the English slaveowner who bought a black slave at the market “did not have the help of the law of England to enforce the bond at the level of enslavement, though they may well have had other kinds of power,” is quite relevant. It was precisely the absence of the legal status of a slave that offered the slave a loophole to refuse and at the same time gave the owner free hand to enslave his black African, exploiting him or her as an unpaid domestic servant.¹⁰⁸¹

Jacques Francis, the Case of the Guinea Diver

Thanks to an extraordinary court case we have a record of one African working in England in 1540s with the status of “slave.”¹⁰⁸² Jaques Francis (Jaques Frauncys), a twenty-year-old onetime pearl fisherman from Guinea¹⁰⁸³ was employed as a diver by an Italian, Pieter Paulo Corso, on a salvage mission to retrieve cargo from sunken vessels off Southampton.¹⁰⁸⁴ “Domenico Erizo, one of the consortium of Florentine and Venetian merchants who owned the cargo, subsequently claimed that Corso had secretly removed tin from the sunken ship and hidden it away for his own benefit.”¹⁰⁸⁵ The parties ended up in court in 1547, and every thing we know about Jacques Francis “is based on a set of interrogatories conducted by the High

Court of Admiralty in London.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Jacques Francis was deposed, as were all the other parties on both sides.

Offering a confident defense of his master, Francis spoke through an interpreter in, either, Portuguese, or, more likely, the “‘fala da Guine,’ the nonstandard Africanized form of Portuguese spoken by most Africans in Portugal.”¹⁰⁸⁷ The plaintiffs were not pleased that Francis was allowed to provide evidence. “The Italian witnesses, coming from a country with a long tradition in dealing with black slaves and servants, were strongly prejudiced against his presence. And they raised a number of controversial issues that may have surprised the English court.”¹⁰⁸⁸ The Italian’s were dumbfounded that the word of a “slave,” a “morisco,” a “Blackemore,” a “bondeman,” and an “infidell borne” was given credence in an English Court of law. “Foreign merchants residing in England were under the illusion that English legislation on black slaves was as far advanced as the highly developed legal codes in their own countries. In fact, no such specialized body of laws existed yet and was not to exist until well into the eighteenth century.”¹⁰⁸⁹ For its part, the Admiralty Court was not swayed by these protests. And Jacques Francis’ testimony was upheld as admissible.

Jacques Francis was not intimidated; he “stood his ground, seizing the opportunity offered him by an English law court of making the best of the dispute over his humanity, his black identity, and over the definition of his legal status and ethnic origin.” The challenge to Francis’ identity and status can be understood as “symptomatic of the difficulties in coming to terms with the racial ambiguities ... in early modern Europe and, in particular, in England.”¹⁰⁹⁰ It was a pyrrhic victory because from this point going forward we can expect “these forms of prejudice being utilised to justify discrimination against and mistreatment of

Black people for centuries to come.”¹⁰⁹¹ Once again, it is Gustav Ungerer who sums up the impact of this astonishing case in his article “Recovering a Black African’s Voice” (2008).

The High Court of Admiralty's decision to admit a black witness has to be seen as an instance of pragmatic tolerance. It enabled Jacques Francis to achieve what promised to look like a legal recognition of the incipient black presence in early modern England. He succeeded in demonstrating that a black African was capable of articulation, of giving his views an individual voice, and of providing expert information on a series of salvage operations whose level of technological achievement the English do not seem to have attained to. He thus upset the white man's notion of the black man's inferiority and unteachability, ... The court's landmark decision, however, was of no consequence. It came far too early. As things turned out, the steadily increasing influx of black Africans after 1550 gave rise to the discourse of difference...[and,] the system of the common law with its hostility to the codifying nature of the continental Roman law tradition can be made partly responsible for the confusion over the legal status of black servants and Negroes that prevailed until the 1720s.¹⁰⁹²

Jacques Francis, unlike the majority of black slaves in early modern England whose personal histories have been silenced and obliterated wrote himself into the annals of Tudor naval history in presenting the judges of the court of admiralty a personal account of his lived experience as a diver in Southampton waters.

Tudor Voyages

Certain early Tudor voyages of discovery in the sixteenth century, in which Africans were brought back to England, were documented in contemporary travel narratives. This seminal, direct encounter of the English with black Africans came almost one hundred years after the Portuguese Prince, Henry the Navigator, had launched continuous voyages into the “newly discovered lands of Africa.”¹⁰⁹³ Although no record has been found, “it is not inconceivable that it was a Portuguese vessel that brought the first Englishman to Guinea.” English sailors were known to have served aboard Portuguese ships. The English and the

Portuguese had had some manner of a middling trade relationship since the eleventh century. Spanish historians have followed his recommendation, establishing the undeniable fact that the English merchants stationed in Andalusia at the close of the fifteenth century kept African slaves, Moors, mulattoes, and Negroes as domestic servants and as indentured workers in their soap factories.

What is more, the English merchants, in the wake of their Genoese partners and in emulation of their Spanish colleagues, became heavily enmeshed in the African slave trade as early as the 1480s when the trade was still in its infancy.¹⁰⁹⁴ When the English voyages to Africa began in earnest, they followed the lead of the Portuguese and went in quest of gold, ivory, pepper and eventually slaves. Of course, in a post-Reformation England the Papal Bulls granting monopolies to Catholic states had no teeth, so trespassing on Portuguese trade rights in Africa was less of an obstacle and sentiment for the old royal ties had faded in post-Plantagenet Tudor glory. Elizabeth I, once she was at war with Spain could turn a tolerant eye to the aggression of her nation's sea dogs and their interests in Africa, which she favored with charters. It is often pointed out that trade with Africa was never a goal in itself: it was always a means to an end, to find passage to the East, to India.

It has become a truism that John Lok brought the first Africans into England in 1555. Lok was an English merchant who sailed for the West Coast of Africa in 1554, a foray into what was then called the Guinea trade. The account of this enterprise, authored by Richard Eden, was first published in *The Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555). Eden described the "land of 'the blacke Moores, called Ethiopians, or Negroes, all which are watered with the ryver Negro, called in olde tyme, Niger.'" Decades later, Eden's text was published by Richard

Hakluyt in *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* in 1589. A second edition of Hakluyt is dated 1598-1600.

Lok returned with a manifest that included “certaine blacke slaves whereof some were tall and strong men.” They found the food, English culture and customs tolerable enough because they stayed even though the “colde and moyst air doth somewhat offend them.”¹⁰⁹⁵ Follarin Shyllon disputes that these West Africans were slaves. He says that they were “sent to the country to learn English, so that on their return to Africa they would ““be a helpe to Englishmen’ as interpreters”¹⁰⁹⁶ One of the five remained in England having married ““a fair English-woman’ who subsequently gave birth to a baby ‘in all respects as black as his father.’”¹⁰⁹⁷

It is clear that there is no general acceptance of these *known facts*. Because Sharpe writes that “five black slaves [were] brought by a merchant to London in 1554.”¹⁰⁹⁸ One historian tells us that John Lok brought Africans, “Binne, Anthonie and George,” from West Africa in 1555.¹⁰⁹⁹ Another historian tells us “Binne, Anthonie and George” were “acquired” by the Lok in Portugal and then brought to England.¹¹⁰⁰ And yet another scholar puts forward 1551 as the date of the first arrival when “two Moores being nobleman, whereof one was the king’s blood conveyed by the said Master Thomas Windham in their countrey in England.”¹¹⁰¹

Each of the preceding statements contains elements of truth, so what is the accurate sequence of events? Clearly the specific details of these competing time-honored maxims warrant a new look, particularly since noting the first arrival is such a significant event.

It was not long before the English and their European counterparts were competing for dominance in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹¹⁰² It is to its ignominious shame that England,

although a latecomer “became the leading slave mistress, slave trader, and slave carrier of the world”¹¹⁰³ It would only be a couple of generations later before The Royal Africa Company would be chartered in 1660 by James I’s grandson, Charles II, and a robust and cruel slave trade would be born in Britain.

Elizabethans and Colonization

It was only during Elizabeth’s reign that the commercial and trade prospects of “exploration and plantation” as a means to riches and domination came to the Englishman’s consciousness.¹¹⁰⁴ “The first English slave-trading expedition was that of Sir John Hawkins” in 1562. But his 300 captured Africans never set foot in England; they “were sold to the Spaniards in the West Indies.”¹¹⁰⁵ It is important to remember that during “the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a ‘colonial power.’”¹¹⁰⁶ But it would not take long before The Royal Africa Company would be chartered (1660), and a robust and cruel slave trade would be born in Britain. It is to its ignominious shame that England, although a latecomer “became the leading slave mistress, slave trader, and slave carrier of the world.”¹¹⁰⁷

It was during Elizabeth’s reign the first Sir John Hawkins undertook the first slave-trading expedition to the Guinea coast of West Africa in 1562, supported by the Queen’s silver.¹¹⁰⁸ He captured 300 captured Africans who never set foot in England; they “were sold to the Spaniards in the West Indies.”¹¹⁰⁹ Although Hawkins slave trading endeavors were out of the ordinary and rarely accomplished, one can speculate, as Hugh Thomas does, “why it is that John Hawkins remains a national hero, although his three voyages to the Caribbean in the 1560s, one with Francis Drake on board, were primarily slaving voyages.”¹¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Although the documentary evidence that there was a foundational African presence in Britain in the sixteenth century is indisputable, it is not robust. The record exists in the parish records official state papers and court records, private correspondence, visual culture, and travel narratives from Tudor voyages of trade and exploration, and there is plenty more to be teased-out.¹¹¹¹ Richard Hakluyt's three volume compendium of travel narratives *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589, 1599, 1600) is an extraordinary record of the English encounter with Africa. It is there one can actually read accounts of black people voluntarily being brought into England directly from Africa with dates and descriptions, and even a few names. Britain had long-standing and close diplomatic ties with Portugal during its discovery and exploration period. There is evidence of migration of blacks to England from Portugal who brought special skills. No doubt there are more plenty more examples than we have yet found record of. Documentary research in the archives of the sixteenth century are challenging.

Most black people would have been attached to households, and family records present their own challenges of identification and access. When the household is royal we have more chance of finding the evidence. Tudor and Stuart monarchs were entertained by performers who were Africans or of African origin. When black people got into trouble, like everyone else you will find accounts of their putative transgression in various court records.¹¹¹² There are wills. There are wards. People of indeterminate status often locate in the margins, they drift to the communities outside the law. These were also the communities where London's theaters were located: Shakespeare's professional orbit. Here are the stews,

the loci of illicit, the rough taverns, like the one where Kit Marlow was murdered in a fight, and bearbaiting were enjoyed by a rich miscellany of London's denizens and visitors.

APPENDIX OF PARISH RECORD ENTRIES

St Botolph Without Aldgate (a.k.a. St Botolph Aldgate) , Aldgate High Street (.87 miles northeast of city center), at the meeting of Houndsditch and Aldgate High Street was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666, rebuilt 1741. Holy Trinity Minories was united to St Botolph Aldgate in 1893. Parish records are in the London Metropolitan Archives: baptisms 1558 -1927, marriages 1558-1695, 1711-1945, banns 1653-8, 1754-1846, burials 1558-1695, 1711-1853.

Here it was, too, that Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe got married. Geoffrey Chaucer was a parishioner and Isaac Newton lived opposite.

There has been a church for more than a thousand years at the 'ald' or 'old' gate at the eastern edge of the City of London. Look around England and you'll find more than 70 churches to St Botolph and they're very often found at city gates. Botolph, a Saxon who probably lived in Suffolk in the seventh century became the patron saint of travellers and so it made sense for arrivals at the city to give thanks to Botolph. The City of London had no fewer than four of them, with the surviving St Botolph without Bishopsgate and St Botolph Aldersgate, and St Botolph Billingsgate lost in the Great Fire of 1666. There's a certain logic that the church became a shelter for homeless and rootless travellers within the city too.¹¹¹³

St Botolph Aldgate a.k.a. **St Bardolph Aldgate**

12 records years 1586-1623. 16 black people in the records and one Indian.

1. St Botolph Aldgate. 1586: 22 October, burial of 'Christopher Cappervert, a blacke moore.'

2. St Botolph Aldgate. 1587: 27 August, 'Domingo, a negroe' beinge a Ginnye negaro and beinge servaunt to the Right Worshipfull S(i)r William Winter knight.

The paper burial register gives the same entry in the following words:

‘Domingo, a black neigro servaunt unto Sir William Winter, was buried the 27 of August. East [end]. Con[sumption?]. Yeres 40.’

The parish clerk’s memorandum book, gives:

Domingo, beinge a Ginnye negaro and beinge servaunt to the Right Worshipfull S(i)r William Winter knyght, dwellinge in the abbye place, beinge the mannor howse of Eastsmithfield, was buried the xxviith daye of August [1587]. He had the best clothe. Con[sumption?].’

3. *St Botolph Aldgate.* 1593: 8 August, burial of ‘Suzanna Peiris, a blackamoore servant to John Despinois’

4. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 20 August 1593, burial of ‘Symon Valencia, a Blackamoore’ servaunt to Stephen Drifyeld a nedellmaker.

5. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 8 October 1593, burial of ‘Cassangoe, a blacke a moore servant to Mr Barbor.’

6. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 29 November 1593, burial of ‘Roberte, a blackamore servant to William Mathew

7. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 3 June 1597, baptism of ‘Marye Phillis, a blackmore, beinge aboute twentye yeres of age and dwellinge with Millicen [*sic*, for ‘Millicent’] Porter sempster’

3 June 1597, ‘Marye Fillis of Morisco, being a black more. She was of late servant with one M(ist)res Barker in Marke Lane, a widdowe. She said hir father’s name was Fillis of Morisco, a black more, being both a basket maker and also a shovell maker.

8. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 27 April 1618, burial of ‘Anne Vause, a black-more, wife to Anthonie Vause, Trompetter, of the said countrey’

9. *St Botolph Aldgate:* 8 Sept 1618, burial of ‘James (an Indian), servant to Mr James Duppa, beerebrewer’ (GL Ms 9222/1)

10. *St Botolph Aldgate*: 3 March 1596/7, burial of a ‘negar, suposed to be named **Frauncis**. He was servant to Peter Miller a beare brewer’ ...gives the dwelling at the signe of the hartes horne in the libertie of East Smithfield.

11. *St Botolph Aldgate*: 4 November 1623, burial of ‘a blackamoore woman that died in the street, named **Marie**’

12. *St Botolph Aldgate*: 26 November 1623, burial of ‘John Come Quicke, a blacke-moore so named, servant to Thomas Love, a Captaine’

*St Olave Hart Street, Hart Street, in the City of London is a small mediaeval church, where Samuel Pepys and his wife Elizabeth lie buried. It was badly damaged by enemy action during the Second World War and fully restored during the 1950's. The church is one of the smallest in the City and is one of only a handful of medieval City churches that escaped the Great Fire of London in 1666. It is dedicated to the patron saint of Norway, King Olaf II of Norway, who fought alongside the Anglo-Saxon King Ethelred the Unready against the Danes in the Battle of London Bridge in 1014.*¹¹¹⁴

St Olave Hart Street

9 records years 1588-1638.

1. *St Olave Hart Street*: 6th June 1588, burial of ‘Isabell, a blackamore’

2. *St Olave Hart Street*: 29th June 1588, burial of... ‘a man blackamore laye in the streete’

3. *St Olave Hart Street*: 13 July 1590, burial of ‘Grace, a nigro, oute of Dr Hector’s’

4. *St Olave Hart Street*: 5 Sept 1590, burial of ‘Francisco, a nigro’

5. *St Olave Hart Street*: 23 January 1596, burial of ‘George, a blackeamore out of Mrs Barkers’

6. *St Olave Hart Street*: 23 November 1598, baptism of ‘Madelen, a blackeamore, oute of Bernade’s house’

7. *St Olave Hart Street*: 25 January 1616/7, burial of ‘Mark Antonie, a negro

Christian’

8. *St Olave Hart Street:* 4 December 1633, baptism of ‘Thomas Wood, a blackamore’

9. *St Olave Hart Street:* 5 May 1638, baptism of ‘Thomas Williams, a blackamoore’

*St Andrew Holborn, a large parish for the City, is a Church of England church on the north western edge of the City of London, on Holborn within the Ward of Farringdon Without. Welcome to the history section of St. Andrew Holborn. St Andrew Holborn has been a site of worship for at least 1000 years but when the Crypt was excavated in 2001 Roman remains were found so the site could have been in use for much longer still. Situated between the City and the West End, it has been a powerful inspiration for centuries. St Andrew Holborn has been a site of worship for at least 1000 years but when the Crypt was excavated in 2001 Roman remains were found so the site could have been in use for much longer still. Situated between the City and the West End, it has been a powerful inspiration for centuries.*¹¹¹⁵

St Andrew Holborn

2 records years 1589 -1633. one black person in the records and one Indian.

1. *St Andrew Holborn:* 30 January 1589/90, burial of ‘Sebrina, a blackmore

2. *St Andrew Holborn:* 17 April 1633, burial of ‘Thomas a[n] Indian, out of the Lord Brooke’s house, was layed in the Church as Catumelant’ “Catumelant” in the entry above appears to signify that the individual was a *catechumen*, a Christian convert under instruction prior to baptism.

St Botolph Without Bishopsgate (a.k.a. *St Botolph Bishopsgate*) (.87 miles northeast of city centre) was damaged in 1666, rebuilt in 1725. All Saints Skinner Street united to *St Botolph* in 1869. * Parish records are in the Guildhall Library: baptisms 1558-1898, marriages 1558-1958, banns 1653-60, 1833-1950, marriage licenses 1848-1873

burials 1558-1849. Later baptisms and marriages registers held by incumbent. A partial index to baptisms and marriages 1558-1862 is in the IGI¹¹¹⁶

1. St Botolph Bishopsgate: 25 September 1586, baptism of ‘Elizabeth, a negro child, born white, the mother a negro’

St Ann Blackfriars (0.62 west of City Centre) *was destroyed in 1666 and not rebuilt (two portions of churchyard remain). It was united to St Andrew by the Wardrobe in 1670. Parish records are in the Guildhall Library: baptisms 1560-1861, marriages 1562-1726, 1813-40, banns 1716/7-24, burials 1566-1849. Later baptisms registers are retained by the incumbent. For later marriages and for banns 1822-45 and marriage licenses 1712-1889, see St Andrew by the Wardrobe. A partial index to baptisms for 1560-1861 is in the IGI. Two to four Combs records are in the IGI: It was near the Blackfriars Theatre, a fact which displeased its congregation.*¹¹¹⁷

1. St Ann Blackfriars: 8 January 1587/8, burial of ‘Domyngo, a blackmore’

St Stephen Coleman Street: *The parish of St. Stephen Coleman Street lies 1.24 mi. due north of City Centre, adjacent to St. Mary the Virgin Aldermanbury. The church was destroyed in 1666, damaged in 1940 and then sold. It was united with St. Margaret Lothbury in 1954. St. Stephen's parish records are in the Guildhall Library: baptisms, 1538-1951; marriages, 1538-1952; banns 1754-1847 and burials, 1538-1853. The IGI includes a partial index to baptisms and marriages for the years, 1538-1875.*¹¹¹⁸

1. St Stephen Coleman Street: 24 August 1594, burial of ‘Katherin the negar, dwelling with the prince of Portingal [sic for Portugal]’

St Mary Woolchurch Haw *City Centre, London was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666 and not rebuilt. It was united to St Mary Woolnoth in 1670. Parish records are in the Guildhall Library: baptisms 1558-1693/4 & 1814-89, marriages 1559-1666 & 1814-37, banns 1824-65, burials 1558-1665/6 & 1813-48 For baptisms 1693/4-1814 & post-1889, marriages circa 1670-1812 & post-1837, banns 1754-1823 & post-1865, burials circa 1670-1812, see St Mary Woolnoth. A partial index to baptisms and*

*marriages 1558-1885 is in the IGI.*¹¹¹⁹

1. St Mary Woolchurch Haw: between entries for 24 April and 20 May 1597, there is an undated burial of ‘a blakmore belonging to Mr John Davies, died in White Chappel parishe, was laied in the ground in this church yarde *sine frequentia populi et sine ceremoniis quia utrum christianus esset necne nesciebamus* [without any company of people and without ceremony, because we did not know whether he was a Christian or not]

This Marie Fillis being abowt the age of xx yeares and having beene in England for the space of xiii or xiiii yeares, and as yt was not Christned,

St Mary Bothaw: *A former church in the City of London. It was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666 and was never rebuilt. St Mary Bothaw on the south side of Cannon Street in Dowgate Ward was one of the unlucky minority never to be rebuilt. Described by Stow as a “proper church”, its dedication derived from “berthage”, that is it was near a place where ships berthed. It was one of the 13 peculiars within the City and as such came under the patronage of Canterbury Cathedral. Although small it contained the tomb of Henry Fitz-Ailwin de Londonestone , first Lord Mayor of London. Following the fire it was united to St Swithin, London Stone (part of whose materials it incorporated)*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary_Bothaw - cite_note-10. *Partial records still survive at IGI.*¹¹²⁰

1. St Mary Bothaw: 29 March 1601, baptism of ‘Julyane, a blackamore, servant with Alldermane Banynge, of the age of 22 yeares, was baptized and namyd Marye’

St. Benet Fink *was a church in the City of London located on what is now Threadneedle Street. Recorded since the 13th century, the church was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, then rebuilt by the office of Sir Christopher Wren. The rebuilt church was demolished between 1841 and 1846. ‘St. Benet’ is short for ‘St. Benedict’ and this was one of 4 churches in pre-Fire London so dedicated. In the case of St. Benet Fink, it is not certain whether the Benedict referred to was St. Benedict of*

*Nursia, the 6th century founder of Western monasticism or Benedict Biscop, the 7th century Anglo-Saxon founder of Jarrow Priory. 'Fink' according to John Stow is derived from Robert Fink, or Finch, a 13th century benefactor who paid to have the church rebuilt.*¹¹²¹

1. St Benet Fink: 2 June 1606, baptism of 'a man child called John, borne of a blackamore woman & supposed to be the sonne of John Edwardes, a bordder in the howse of William Conrado's'

St Mildred Poultry (1.24 mi. north of city centre) was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666, rebuilt, sold in 1872, then demolished. St Mary Colechurch was united to St Mildred Poultry in 1670. * Both were united to St Olave Old Jewry in 1871, and to St Margaret Lothbury in 1886. Parish records are in the Guildhall Library: baptisms 1538-1870, marriages 1538-1871, banns 1756-65 and 1792-1870, burials 1538-1852. For later baptisms, marriages and banns see St Olave Jewry. A partial index to baptisms and marriages 1538-1870 is in the IGI.¹¹²²

1. St Mildred Poultry: 1 January 1610/11, baptism of 'John Jaquoah, a king's sonne in Guinnye' 'Dederi Jaquoah about the age of 20 yeares, the sonne of Caddi-biah king of the river of Cetras or Cestus in the cuntrey of Guinny, who was sent out of his cuntrey by his father, in an english shipp called the Abigail of London, belonging to Mr John Davies of this parish, to be baptised.

St Dunstan in the West: *The original St. Dunstan-in-the-West stood on the same site as today, spilling in the past onto what is now the tarmac of Fleet Street. It is not known exactly when the original church was built, but it was between 988 and 1070 A.D. It is not impossible that Saint Dunstan himself, or priests who knew him well, decreed that a church was needed here. The Church narrowly escaped the Great Fire of London in 1666. The quick thinking of the Dean of Westminster saved the church: he roused forty scholars from Westminster School in the middle of the night, who extinguished the flames with buckets of water. The flames came within three doors of St. Dunstan's.*¹¹²³

1. ***St Dunstan in the West***: 2 August 1616, burial of ‘Peter, a blackamore ... from Mrs Locksmithe’s’

2. ***St Dionis Backchurch*** was a church dedicated to the patron saint of France http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Dionis_Backchurch - cite_note-2 in *Langbourn Ward one of the 25 within the City of London, first mentioned in 1538* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Dionis_Backchurch - cite_note-5 at which *Samuel Pepys worshipped. Destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 it was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren in 1674 and a steeple added ten years later]. The 1724 organ was the last to be built by Renatus Harris and the composer Dr Charles Burney was its organist from 1749 to 1751. As the City population declined the church became one of the first*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Dionis_Backchurch - cite_note-11 *to be united under the 1860 benefices Act Partial records survive and are accessible on IGI.*¹¹²⁴

1. ***St Dionis Backchurch***: 22 December 1616, baptism of ‘an East Indian, was christened by the name of Peter’

Holy Trinity the Less was an ancient church within the boundaries of the City of London which was destroyed during the Great Fire of London in September 1666. In 1670 a Rebuilding Act was passed and a committee set up under the stewardship of Sir Christopher Wren to decide which would be rebuilthttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Trinity_the_Less - cite_note-3. *Fifty-one were chosen, but Holy Trinity the Less was one of the unlucky minority never to be rebuilt. It is unusual in that it was a comparatively new building having only been rebuilt in 1606, although Stow could trace its roots back to 1266. Today the site of the building lies underneath the entrance to Mansion House tube station*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Trinity_the_Less - cite_note-11.¹¹²⁵

1. ***Holy Trinity the Less***: 24 December 1617, marriage of ‘James Curren, beinge a Moore Christian and Margaret Person, a maid’

St Katharine's by the Tower - full name ***Royal Hospital and Collegiate Church of St. Katharine by the Tower*** - was a medieval church and hospital next to the Tower of London. The establishment was founded in 1148 and demolished in 1825 to build St Katharine Docks, which takes its name from it.¹¹²⁶

1. ***St Katharine by the Tower***: 20 August 1623, baptism of ‘Phillip, an Indian blackmore, borne in the East Indies at Zarat’

St. Giles Cripplegate Church, named for the patron saint of cripples, managed to survive the ravages of the Great Fire of 1666 but was so badly damaged by a World War II bomb that only the tower survived. St. Giles was built in 1550 on the site of a previous Norman church was refurbished during the 1950s to serve as the parish church of the Barbican development and now seems to stand awkwardly amid the uncompromising modernity of the Barbican. English revolutionary Oliver Cromwell married Elizabeth Bourchier here in 1620, and the poet John Milton was buried here in 1674. More than a century later, someone opened the poet's grave, knocked out his teeth, stole a rib bone, and tore hair from his skull.¹¹²⁷

1. ***St Giles Cripplegate***: 3 February 1659, burial of ‘Yahma a blackmore servant to John Smith, gent[leman] at Bunnhill, below [place buried], flox [cause of death; confluent smallpox]’

Entries from other records

Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell: 15 December 1576, in relation to Ann Levens, a prostitute, presented before the Court: ‘She sayeth that a tall blacke man with a blacke beard and a straunger had the use of her body at Mrs Esgrigges at White Fryers’ (GL Ms 33011/3 f.97). *Entry supplied by J. Freeman*

Digital images of the minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell are available on the www.bethlehemheritage.org.uk website.

Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell: 15 May 1577, Peter Peringe, ‘a blackamore confessed he had the use of the body of Margery Williams’ (GL Ms 33011/3 f.218). *Entry supplied by J. Freeman*

All Hallows Staining, Churchwardens’ Accounts: 1596/7, ‘received for the buriall of a black more 000-00-04’ (GL Ms 4956/2, f.185)

St Michael Cornhill, Churchwardens’ Accounts 1602(?), ‘Item given the ninth of Januarie unto a poore Barbarian w[hi]ch had binne robbed at sea and taken by Pirates the like not to be allowed’ (GL Ms 4071/2 f. 38v, top of page) *Entry supplied by Anne O’Grady*

Commissary Court ‘Ex Officio’ Book: April 1632, ‘Grace–, a blackamoore presented by churchwardens for living incontinently with Walter Church. Stepney (GL Ms 9065E/1 f.81)

A name, possible from the other party, is given but is illegible.

Worshipful Company of Skinners, Receipts and payments ledger 1646-72 , ‘Paid given the 2 Nigroes that ridd the Lucernes - £00-12-00’ (GL Ms 30727/7 p.448). *Entry supplied by Stephen Freeth.*

What follows is some of the records that stand out. (I have kept my numbering intact to cross reference with the preceding master list).

2. St Botolph Aldgate. 1587: 27 August, [died] ‘**Domingo**, a negroe’ beinge a Ginnye negaro and beinge servaunt to the Right Worshipfull S(i)r William Winter knight.

This record is one of two that identify the black person as being from Guinea (“Ginnye”). I assume this to mean he was brought to England from Africa. (I do not know if the absence of the term means the opposite). *Winter, Sir William (c.1525–1589), [was] naval administrator... In the summer of 1553 Winter invested in, and sailed on, Thomas Wyndham's*

voyage to Guinea. The expedition cost Wyndham his life, but Winter returned safely, and seems to have recouped a handsome profit.... Winter invested money in John Hawkins's voyage of 1564, but apart from that is not known to have traded in his own right after 1553. He owned one ship, which he appears to have used mainly for privateering, but was primarily a navy man, well known for his commitment both at sea and ashore.... He had a house in London, described in 1587 as being 'in the abbye place Beinge the Mannor howse of Eastsmithfield' (GL, MS 2934/1), and divided his time between London, Deptford, and Lydney, where he was carrying out extensive work on his house at the time of his death.... Winter died a rich man...¹¹²⁸

1. St Mildred Poultry: 1 January 1610/11, baptism of 'John Jaquoah, a king's sonne in Guinnye' 'Dederi Jaquoah about the age of 20 yeares, the sonne of Caddi-biah king of the river of Cetras or Cestus in the cuntrey of Guinny, who was sent out of his cuntrey by his father, in an english shipp called the Abigail of London, belonging to Mr John Davies of this parish,¹¹²⁹ to be baptised.

This record is the second of two that identify the black person as being from Guinea ("Guinny"). The extraordinary thing here is that this is the record of the baptism of an African prince, baptism of 'John Jaquoah' Unlike the two African Princes introduced previously - who were captured against their will - this man had been sent by his father to England for Christianization. John Davies, a haberdasher *cum* shipowner is the Prince's unlikely beneficiary and possible namesake.¹¹³⁰ "In 1611, the *Abigail* sails again to Guinea; in July, the ship is attacked by pirates." "and a Youth called Iohn" is on board.¹¹³¹ Professor Roslyn Knutson, a Shakespeare scholar at the University of Arkansas, who discovered this record, presumes this youth to be the prince. She speculates on his fate in an article written in 1994 called "A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry."¹¹³²

1. St Mary Woolchurch Haw: between entries for 24 April and 20 May 1597, there is an undated burial of 'a blakmore belonging to Mr John Davies, died in White Chappel parishe, was laied in the ground in this church yarde *sine frequentia populi et sine ceremoniis quia utrum christianus esset necne nesciebamus* [without any company of people and without ceremony, because we did not know whether he was a Christian or not]

This is our same Mr. Davies. It seems likely that if this person was also African since it is not clear if he/she were baptized. It is odd that Davies, so invested in the baptism of John Jaquoah has no idea if this person, presumably as servant or a slave is a Christian. It is a very telling story about class: bondsmen versus elite Africans. A rare example.¹¹³³

2. St Andrew Holborn: 17 April 1633, burial of 'Thomas a[n] Indian, out of the Lord Brooke's house, was layed in the Church as Catumelant' "Catumelant" in the entry above appears to signify that the individual was a *catechumen*, a Christian convert under instruction prior to baptism.

This record – that references the death of an Indian – is interesting for the information it gives

on Christian conversion. *Lord Brooke*” is “*Fulke Greville, the first Baron Brooke of Beauchamps Court (1554–1628), courtier and author...was first of two children of Sir Fulke Greville (1536–1606) and Lady Anne (d. 1583)... He was probably born at Beauchamp's Court in Alcester, Warwickshire, the home of his paternal grandfather, Sir Fulke Greville (d. 1560)... The youngest of the three Fulke Grevilles was thus a member of an influential landowning Warwickshire family...*”¹¹³⁴ After the death of his father in 1606, Fulke became Recorder of Stratford-upon-Avon, at a time when Shakespeare was transitioning out of London to return to his home town. He is also famous for his claim to have been the “Master of Shakespeare” and the author of a “lost” play called “Antony and Cleopatra.”

St Botolph Aldgate: 3 June 1597, baptism of ‘**Marye Phillis**, a blackmore, beinge aboute twentye yerres of age and dwellinge with Millicen [*sic*, for ‘Millicent’] Porter sempster’

3 June 1597, ‘Marye Fillis of Morisco, being a black more. She was of late servant with one M(ist)res Barker in Marke Lane, a widdowe. She said hir father’s name was Fillis of

Morisco, a black more, being both a basket maker and also a shovell maker.

This Marie Fillis being aboute the age of xx yeares and having beene in England for the space of xiii or xiiii yeares, and as yt was not Christned...

This is the record of the baptism of a twenty-year-old black woman. She has a last name Phillis (or Fillis), which is the name of her father. Her father is a morisco, it would appear. Morisco usually means a Christianized Muslim in Spain or Portugal.¹¹³⁵ So it is interesting that Marie is not baptized: She has been in England twelve or thirteen years. Her father has the skills of two trades, it leads to speculation that he was not in service.

1. St Stephen Coleman Street: 24 August 1594, burial of ‘Katherin the negar, dwelling with the prince of Portingal [*sic* for Portugal]

Katherine was part of the household of the Portuguese Pretender, Dom Antonio, whom I have already introduced.

1. St Olave Hart Street: 13 July 1590, burial of ‘Grace, a nigro, oute of Dr Hector’s’

Grace was in the household of Dr. Hector Nunes. She died one year before the doctor. ***Nunes*** [*Nuñez*], ***Hector*** [*known as Dr Hector*] (1520–1591), physician and merchant, was born in Evora, Portugal. His family were among those Jews who had been forcibly baptized in 1497 by order of King Manuel I. He studied medicine at Coimbra University, taking a BA in 1540 and an MB in 1543. Because at this time the Portuguese Inquisition started to persecute the New Christians, he left Portugal. In 1549 he was living in London, in the parish of St Olave, Hart Street... As well as trading as a merchant, Nunes had a court practice as a physician... He was endenized as an English subject in 1579 and after that publicly conformed to the Church of England, while presumably practising Judaism in the privacy of his home. The statute concerning the burning of heretics (*De haeretico comburendo*) made it

*unsafe to do otherwise... In 1582 his household included his wife, three clerks, and **two black women**. Nunes and his wife had no surviving children... Nunes was a well-known figure in Elizabethan London, both as a physician and as a merchant. His trading connections with Spain and Portugal, his vulnerability as a refugee, and his loyalty made him valuable to the English government. Walsingham made good use of him both as a diplomatic intermediary and as a source of intelligence about the Spanish armada.*¹¹³⁶ Dr. Hector will appear again later in this essay.

8. St Botolph Aldgate: 27 April 1618, burial of ‘Anne Vause, a black-more, wife to Anthonie Vause, Trompetter, of the said countrey’

1. Holy Trinity the Less: 24 December 1617, marriage of ‘James Curre, beinge a Moore Christian and Margaret Person, a maid’

1. St Benet Fink: 2 June 1606, baptism of ‘a man child called John, borne of a blackamore woman & supposed to be the sonne of John Edwardes, a bordder in the howse of William Conrado’s’

1. St Botolph Bishopsgate: 25 September 1586, baptism of ‘Elizabeth, a negro child, born white, the mother a negro’

Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell: 15 December 1576, in relation to Ann Levens, a prostitute, presented before the Court: ‘She sayeth that a tall blacke man with a blacke beard and a straunger had the use of her body at Mrs Esgrigges at White Fryers’

Commissary Court ‘Ex Officio’ Book: April 1632, ‘Grace–, a blackamoore presented by churchwardens for living incontinently with Walter Church. Stepney (GL Ms 9065E/1 f.81)

Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell: 15 May 1577, Peter Peringe, ‘a blackamore confessed he had the use of the body of Margery Williams’ (GL Ms 33011/3 f.218). *Entry supplied by J. Freeman*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: SHAKESPEARE'S AFRICAN IMAGINARY

“Moors” On the London Stage and The Representation of Blackness

*So Geographers in Afric-maps
With Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps;
And o'er uninhabitable Downs
Place Elephants for want of Towns.*

– Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

*What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?*

– Countee Cullen (1903-1946)

'MOORS' ON THE LONDON STAGE

Othello, the Signifying Moor

Coinciding with the flowering of renaissance drama during the sixteenth century, English poets and playwrights began to construct a concept of black Africans to which they responded in their works of fiction¹¹³⁷ Londoners had seen “Moors” among the *dramatis personae* in the 1590’s, notably in the writing of Christopher Marlowe whose *Tamburlaine* presented vividly the image of the African slave: “With naked negroes shall thy coach be drawn.”¹¹³⁸ And in the work of George Peele, whose *The Battle of Alcazar* “put on the mimetic stage the first black of any dramatic significance,”¹¹³⁹ the “Moor” Muly Hemet: “Black was his looke, and bloodie in his deeds.”¹¹⁴⁰

In the same decade, William Shakespeare wrote two plays with Moors as featured characters: *Titus Andronicus*, presenting Aaron (fig. 151), the “barbarous Moor” with “foul desire,”¹¹⁴¹ and *The Merchant of Venice*, whose courtly, Prince of Morocco hopes that “fair” Portia will not hold his blackness against him as a potential suitor: “Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadowed livery of the burnish’d sun, / To whom I am a neighbour, and near bred.”¹¹⁴²

By the end of the sixteenth century, Moors were so familiar on the English stage “that a boy with theatrical pretensions in [Ben] Johnson’s *Poetaster* (autumn 1601) offers to ‘do the Moor’, adding ‘master, lend me your scarf a little’ (for use as a turban?).”¹¹⁴³

Furthermore, as Ania Loomba reminds us,

there were hundreds of dark-skinned characters on the Elizabethan and Jacobean popular stages, as well as in court theatre, city pageants, masques and public as well as

private entertainments, and even though there are several studies of these figures, Shakespearean drama still tends to be read as isolated from them, or simply as more liberal, or more complex in its representations of otherness.¹¹⁴⁴

Russ McDonald, editor of the new Pelican Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice* (2002), writes this: "We may confidently declare...that a Moor was not an obvious choice as the hero of a tragedy circa 1604."¹¹⁴⁵ But a black tragic hero is just what Shakespeare provided in his transcendent, fascinating, multidimensional character who defies the stereotype of Elizabethan stage convention, Othello.

No black protagonist in the theatrical canon has elicited more contemporaneous enthusiasm and enduring impact than Shakespeare's Othello. He is a man born royal, then taken in slavery, who overcomes his bondage to become an esteemed military general for the storied and resplendent nation-state of Venice. This "noble Moor" dares to defy convention by taking a young white woman, Desdemona, as his wife, only to become the victim of a vengeful officer in his command. Iago convinces Othello that a young lieutenant has cuckolded him and tragedy ensues as the deceived Othello self-destructs, damning himself, his own good fortune and a life of domestic happiness, in a woeful act of murder / suicide. "The terrible truth that Desdemona is chaste and dead means that Othello is damned, a cursed slave," which he brands himself in the misery of discovering her innocence after having killed her.¹¹⁴⁶ This return to the status of erstwhile "slave" for this elite, powerful, well-positioned black man comes after Othello has slavishly ceded his moral compass and his agency to Iago. He is a slave for having allowed Iago to master his character. That is his fatal flaw.

It was Aristotle who introduced the term "fatal flaw" in his famous treatise on drama, the *Poetics*. The idea being that in the convention of dramatic tragedy an error of judgment on the part of a hero is what precipitates his downfall. In literary figures a "fatal flaw" is also

called a “tragic flaw.” It signifies a defective trait in the hero’s make-up that leaves him vulnerable to ill-fate. And it is Shakespeare’s visionary genius that the defective trait or fatal flaw he assigns Othello is the character trait that would become the classic burden of an aspirational black man in a world of white privilege and white supremacy – self-doubt. For what moves Othello to violate his own nature is the particular kind of self-doubt that comes from having a compromised self-image shaped by the negative perceptions and prejudicial treatment of white people. This condition of self-doubt at the core of *Othello* is what is at the core of W.E.B. Du Bois’ famous evocation of “double consciousness,” coined at the cusp of the twentieth century.

Double consciousness is a concept that Du Bois first develops in his book “*The Souls of Black Folk*” (1903). It is the term the great African American historian and philosopher invents to describe what it is like for black people to have to live in two worlds, feeling that your identity is split between dual perspectives: the insular perspective your own unique black experience, but also the perspective of how you might be perceived by the outside white world. Double consciousness is the layer of self-reflectivity that requires black people to develop “the sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”¹¹⁴⁷ This in order to hone the adaptive behavior required to function and even survive in a dominant white society that is hostile to your inclusion.

Perpetuated by mainstream culture, the effect of constantly being required to exercise the conditioning of double consciousness is irreparably damaging to the self-image of black people. Consider Orlando Patterson observation: “Even so extraordinarily successful a person as Elizabeth Alexander, the tenured Yale professor and inaugural poet, claims to be haunted by “a continual underestimation of my intellectual ability and capacity, and the real

insidious aspect of that kind of racism is that we don't know half the time when people are underestimating us."¹¹⁴⁸ The internalization of such racism poisons the black experience.

As Du Bois writes, this process elicits the destructive practice of "self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals" among black people that has tragically come to define them.¹¹⁴⁹ This collective universe of racialized attitudes and experience that falls under the identifier double consciousness is the context for understanding Othello's "fatal flaw."

In drama, the hero's fatal flaw is always the key to the message of the play. It is why an indictment of racism should be recognized as what Shakespeare set up for his audience to take away from an enactment of *Othello*.

Robin Blackburn in *The Making of New World Slavery* (1997), provides cultural context for Othello's signifying presence as Shakespeare's "noble Moor" on the London stage.

References to blacks in Elizabethan England combine repugnance, ambivalence and curiosity. There would be no tragedy in Shakespeare's *Othello* if there was not nobility in the Moor, yet this construction was itself portrayed as a reversal of a received stereotype.¹¹⁵⁰

G. K. Hunter calls *Othello* "the most magnificent specimen of the dramatic 'inversion of expected racial values'" formed in the realm of an author's imagination.¹¹⁵¹

Othello's Blackness

In English drama, "Othello became the defining representation of the 'Moor.'"¹¹⁵² And in Elizabethan masques, pageants, poems and plays, the word "'Moor' became synonymous with 'black African.'"¹¹⁵³ In spite of this, in his much favored Arden 3rd Series Edition of the

playscript published in 1997, A.J. Honigmann addresses the controversy among literary scholars that has raged for centuries as to whether (or not) Othello is black: “I cannot agree with those who say of Othello’s race ““that in regard to the essentials of his character it is not important.””¹¹⁵⁴ Honigmann makes it clear in a note that he is referring specifically to Gerald Bentley’s 1958 introduction to the play. “On the contrary.” The Arden editor elaborates, Othello’s blackness “seems to me as crucial as Shylock’s Jewishness, or even more so.”¹¹⁵⁵

M. R. Ridley – Honigmann’s predecessor as editor of the 1958 Arden *Othello* – helps us understand this historical “controversy” with language influenced by the date of its writing in his introduction:

It is perhaps as well to take first the question of Othello’s colour, not only because it has been much disputed but because the picture we make as we read, or have presented to us upon the stage, of Othello’s physical appearance is of real importance for the understanding of the play. Much argument, and even more plentiful lack of it, has been devoted to showing that Othello was not black, or alternatively that he was at least not what Coleridge calls; a “veritable negro”. But rather, like the Prince of Morocco in a Q stage-direction in *The Merchant of Venice*, a ‘tawny Moor.’¹¹⁵⁶

Here we are presented with a perceived hierarchy in skin tone known as *colorism*: lighter is better because it is closer to white. The same principle would apply to the taxonomy of Othello’s facial features. “Coleridge, rather surprisingly,” Ridley writes when evoking the views of the famous nineteenth-century poet, “admits the blackness but insists that he was a Moor in our sense of the word: “the light-skinned tawny kind. Coleridge wants a Moor who is fashioned from the material of his own, circumscribed, nineteenth century English cultural experience. And as Ridley observes:

The reduction ad absurdum of this line of criticism was achieved by a lady writing from Maryland, who said, ‘In studying the play of *Othello*, I have always *imagined* its hero a *white* man. It is true the dramatist paints him black, but this shade does not suit the man. It is a stage decoration, which *my taste* discards.’¹¹⁵⁷

In her letter, the Maryland Lady concludes triumphantly: ““Othello *was* a *white* man,”” adding, ““Shakespeare was too correct a delineator of human nature to have coloured Othello, *black*, if he had personally acquainted himself with the idiosyncrasies of the African race.””¹¹⁵⁸

Ridley includes this example of an extreme Othello race-denier to make a point about the reason that Othello has been whitened both in readers’ imaginations and on stage over the years. Racism. Thus, Othello’s color is directly determined *not* by what Shakespeare wrote or intended Othello to be but by the cultural politics of the moment of the reader or spectator’s encounter with the text. It is also interesting that Ridley’s Maryland Lady makes the argument against Othello blackness based on the fact that there were no black people in Shakespeare’s world for him to have met. She helps us to understand that this denial comes from the fact that people of her ilk believe that to have met in life a person of African descent would have made it impossible for Shakespeare to have created a black man of Othello’s noble character. Someone of that “race,” possessed of such impeccable honor and virtue, could not possibly exist. Period.

The edition of the text from which I took these quotes is the Routledge 1994 paperback reprint. It was standard fare, particularly in the student marketplace, until Honigmann’s new edition replaced it in 1997. It is still available on the Kindle Store at Amazon.com. Imagine if this is the critical edition of the of the play a young student would encounter today!

Playthell Benjamin, in his contribution to *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers* (1997), responds to the critics, theatre producers and directors, who would deny Othello’s race based on the argument that there were no black people in England in Shakespeare’s time

as “ignorant.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, it is true. Since the late sixties/early seventies, Eldred D. Jones was making the case that critics have “quite erroneous statements about Shakespeare conception of Othello” because they *ignored*, “the presence in fair numbers of black West Africans in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”¹⁶⁰

Although it is a history that requires some unpacking – largely because of white scholarly bias that has suppressed the record – as we have seen in the previous chapter, “Shakespeare’s Black Neighbors,” there has been enough historical evidence to support the claim for a black presence in Tudor and early Stuart England at least since the time Jones first started making his case. And we can now state unequivocally that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were not writing in a vacuum of direct knowledge and experience of black people in their milieu. But that still does not appear to be enough to reify Othello’s blackness.

Race Scholarship Redux

Currently, critical writing about “black Othello” is vexed by a new line of scholarly argument I took great pains to rebut in Part One of this study under the heading “Race and Racism.” This newest theory of investigation that deracinates Othello’s blackness is summarized below by Emily Weissbourd is based on a semantic conceit. I revisit this topic here because it is both a critical practice that affects how I write about this work and also and also a part of the play’s interpretive history, as I trace the pattern of how the representation of Othello’s blackness has been denied by scholars over time. Also, Weissbourd, by way of example makes clear (which is no doubt not her intent) the specific and concrete, negative effects of overdetermined theoretical argument.

We begin with the premise that the story Othello recounts to win Desdemona's heart – the story of his capture “by the insolent foe” and having been “sold into slavery”– is central to the drama.

For readers today these lines, spoken by a character described as ‘black’ on multiple occasions, immediately evoke the specter of the Atlantic triangle and the widespread enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans. In recent years, however, many critics have warned against such association on the grounds that they are anachronistic. They argue that we lose sight of *Othello*'s historical specificity if we read it in the context of racial categories that would only crystalize later in the century with the rise of a plantation economy. Instead scholars such as Jonathan Burton, Julia Reinhardt Lupton, and Daniel Vitkus have suggested that Othello's capture by the “insolent foe” should be read not in the context of the Atlantic slave trade but rather that of piracy and kidnapping in the the Islamic Mediterranean. In this reading, the play becomes a “drama of conversion,” in which Othello's Moorishness associates him with Islam as much as it does with blackness. Placing *Othello* in this Mediterranean context thus avoids naturalizing—enshrining as timeless and essential—vocabularies of race that are in fact the product of a particular moment in the development of a global economy.

Of course this entire argument is predicated on a very narrow reading of “Moor,” by assuming that Moors were only North African Muslims who enslaved benighted Christian captives as far back as the Crusades. This take on “Moor: is a position which I have also forcefully rebutted in Part One under the heading, *The Meme of the Moor, The Matter of the African Prince*. The only reason to relitigate points previously made is to illustrate that the character of Othello as a representation of blackness is still widely contested. There continues to be an almost willful strain in the scholarly world to deny the evidence that Shakespeare intended him to be black. It is almost as if certain scholars were simply saying this about Othello's blackness: “It is a stage decoration, which *my taste* discards.”

In matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse.

–Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*¹¹⁶¹

Performing Race and Gender

In a chapter entitled “Othello was a white man,” to be found in her monograph *Shakespeare Without Women* (1999), Dymphna Callaghan makes it clear that the fact that white men “impersonated” both women and blacks on the English Renaissance stage had nothing to do with practical necessity: neither women (“obviously”) nor blacks were absent in early modern England. Not allowing women and blacks to act their own parts was a form of social control over two segments of the population that were culturally and politically marginalized. “While culturally blackness and femininity become identified with one another, literally ... it is not blackness and femininity that are the same but the extra-diegetic white masculinity that underlines them both.”¹¹⁶²

Ania Loomba questions why it is “that while men dressing as women can be regarded as potentially ‘unsettling’ gender categories, no such radical meaning attaches to ‘blacking up.’” She continues: “Can this be one point of entry into considering the tensions between ‘race’ and other categories of social difference? It is also worth considering the double-play that produced non-European women on the stage.”¹¹⁶³ Callaghan underscores a critical point, almost buried by its obviousness, since “neither Africans nor women performed on the public stage.” Othello on stage “*was a white man.*” “But, then again,” she reminds us, “so was Desdemona.”¹¹⁶⁴

Blacking Up

Richard Burbage applied “blackface” to play the role of Othello at the court of James I in 1604. One year later King James’ consort Queen Anne, along with her ladies, “applied burnt cork to their faces and forearms when they performed in Johnson’s *Masque of Blackness*.”¹¹⁶⁵ This was possible because “Africans were involved in civic presentations and women in non-mimetic performances of the court masque.”¹¹⁶⁶ But it was highly unusual for the queen and her ladies to perform blackness. Nonetheless, it is “well known” that white revelers ‘blacked up,’ especially at court, in what Loomba describes as a “rehearsed encounter” between “Europe and its others.”¹¹⁶⁷ English stages were sites of “insistently reproduced cultural difference.”¹¹⁶⁸

Queen Anne's *Masque of Blackness* (fig. 152) should be viewed as an astonishing innovation of with import implications for reading racial attitudes of the time as more tolerant than what is normally assumed.

What makes the masque featuring Queen Anne even more interesting is that in a Scottish court pageant performed eleven years earlier, while he was still only James VI of Scotland, that king had an African man stand in for the part of the Lion. It was a celebration to honor the birth of his son and heir, Henry Frederick in 1594. The African man was described as “‘a Black-Moore’, ‘very richly attyred’, who pretended to haul on ‘great chaines of pure gold’ a chariot in fact propelled by a ‘secreet convoy’”¹¹⁶⁹

Shakespeare's Image of Africa and Blackness

“If anyone wanted the latest scoop on Africa, hot of the presses,” Emily Bartels tells us, the place to turn was Hakluyt’s.”¹¹⁷⁰ Richard Hakluyt, a contemporary of Shakespeare’s, was a public intellectual, a writer and a cosmographer. He is known for promoting the English colonization of North America through his works, notably *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582) and *The Principal Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoueries of the English Nation* (1589–1600). Hakluyt’s books are filled with the travel narratives of early modern voyages of discovery and exploration, including the ones generated from Tudor trade voyages to West Africa. To give you a sense of scale, his books comprise “eight-hundred-plus folio pages of travel narratives and related documents,” most “newly published.”¹¹⁷¹

Hakluyt’s descriptions of Africa are filled with “Africans,” “Negroes,” and

“Ethiopes” who are not always kept distinct from each other and whose nationality, and sometimes color, ally them with the Moors. Yet the latter are nonetheless given a somewhat separate space within the text. Just as Richard Eden initially maps out the division of the continent in his “briefe description” of Africa, so Hakluyt also marks a division within its people.¹¹⁷²

One writer of the period bucked the trend of mostly demonizing Africans as pagans and published at Hakluyt’s urging, an account that compared Africans very ‘favorably’ ‘with his own countrymen,’ the Portuguese. He wrote, ‘excepting for blacknes they are very like to the Portingalles.’ This author was Odoardo Lopez, and his “expansive tract did not appear in English until 1597.”¹¹⁷³

It was only during Elizabeth’s reign that the commercial and trade prospects of “exploration and plantation” as a means to riches and domination came to the Englishman’s

consciousness.¹¹⁷⁴ “Hakluyt, through a conscious agenda, became the great chronicler of this emerging Elizabethan imperialist enterprise of maritime exploration and discovery, all with the purpose of bolstering Britain’s colonial aspirations.¹¹⁷⁵ It is important to remember that during “the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a “colonial power.”¹¹⁷⁶ But It would not take long before The Royal Africa Company would be chartered (1660), and a robust and cruel slave trade would be born in Britain. It is to its ignominious shame that England, although a latecomer, “became the leading slave mistress, slave trader, and slave carrier of the world.”¹¹⁷⁷

Just as English culture simultaneously promoted and denied slavery, so it exhibited contradictory understanding of the nature of slaves and slavery. In a country where all the except the monarch were subjects, and words such as *subject* and *serve* rarely had pejorative connotations, subjection itself was not disgraceful ... But, recognition of the actual contingency of slavery coexisted with a concept of the natural slave, incapable of honor.¹¹⁷⁸

THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACKNESS

Black in the English Mind's Eye

The image of the black Africans in Early modern England was from the outset tainted by racial prejudice based on skin color and associations with slavery.¹¹⁷⁹ These attitudes were already formed in the English by Iberian roots of racist thought based on their knowledge of an Islamic slave trade in sub-Saharan black Africans.¹¹⁸⁰ Although prior to “1440 Christendom had no direct access to an African slave trade,” Islam, on the other hand, had “acquired slaves from black Africa” for hundreds of preceding years. This practice began as early as the seventh century, “and such slaves were common in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire and in North African kingdoms.” And, as in the Christian culture of later centuries, black became “synonymous with slave.”¹¹⁸¹ “The common thread binding Muslim and later Christian racial imagery was as much a rejection of blackness as it was the outcome of the lighter-skinned ruling class’s desire to protect its position of superiority by celebrating its civility.”¹¹⁸² The condition of Africans contributed to the prejudice directed against them. It was a Catch -22. “African captives were deemed stateless and acquired as chattels; they then became part of the slaveholding household.”¹¹⁸³

G.K. Hunter contends that it would be useful to look to the “framework of assumptions concerning foreigners” in the medieval period for clues to a developing “ethnography” of difference in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And although there is “little evidence” to find in medieval literature, Hunter suggests that this should only be our “start point.”¹¹⁸⁴

Drawing on the research of Enid Welsford (1926) and R. Withington (1918) on court masques and English pageantry, Ania Loomba explains that for many “centuries, folk

entertainments as well as upper-class pleasures” featured “‘blacked up’ figures, ‘wild men’ or ‘village grotesques.’” These rough character types were also figures in the “morisco (the word itself meant ‘Moorish’),” which is a “dance” that “arrived from North Africa via Spain;” It even represented “‘a mock fight between Moors and Christians.’” Here “Moor” is meant to mean a North African follower of Islam, which is one of its many uses, as previously discussed in Part One.¹¹⁸⁵

European attitudes towards Islam in the Middle Ages were characterized by ignorance and fear: ignorance of the origins and doctrines of this religion and fear of the military might of its adherents. The Islamic threat was real. By the twelfth century, Europe had mounted three unsuccessful crusades against the Muslims of the Middle East. North African Muslims still possessed a large portion of Spain.

European Christians, as a result of their fear and ignorance, came to portray their non-Christian adversaries in stereotypical terms. Adopting the traditional view that enemies of Christianity are demonically inspired, Europeans Christianity endowed Muslim—Moors, Saracens, and later Turks—with the characteristics of the devil, and as we have seen, one of the devils most important and common characteristics is his supposed blackness.¹¹⁸⁶

Black in the Medieval World View

Meg Twycross, who stands as arguably the most renowned expert on “masking” in Medieval English drama, informs us: “In the English mystery plays a few, notably wicked, human characters,” such as King Herod, in addition to “the devil” and “the dead,” “wear masks or face paint.”¹¹⁸⁷ But she also describes a character in a “folk play,” “‘Dirty Bet,’” who appeared in black-face.¹¹⁸⁸ And, in “the court maskings,” she offers references to “ambassadors from some exotic land, ‘Moreskoes’ or ‘nygrost’ or blacke Mores.” Painting the face or “blacking-up” was the alternative, and the equivalent, to wearing a mask. Twycross takes pains to point out: “Black was not the color of face that a medieval Northern-European expected to see, and therefore must have given the initial shock of the unexpected.”

(However, the discoveries of the forensics anthropologists – such as in Ipswich seem to change the force of this statement.) Nonetheless a human being with a blackened face would still be both unnatural and unreadable: “on the European face, black face paint tends to obscure the features.”¹¹⁸⁹ These images possessed striking visual power. It must have been truly arresting, the encounter with such a representation of alterity. In the sixteenth century, “English men and women were jolted by sudden exposure,” in the flesh, with “peoples remarkably different from themselves. The sub-Saharan African’s black skin—the physical characteristic most immediate and obvious to the European eye—was the visual antithesis of whiteness prized by Elizabeth and her ladies.”¹¹⁹⁰

“Perhaps the physical blackness of the Moor was originally meant only as a metaphor for alleged spiritual blackness,” suggests Anthony Barthelemy.

Whatever the circumstances...the inevitable occurred: Moors came to be thought of as black. The consolidation of sign and sinner was complete. And because *Moor* could not be disassociated from its classical antecedents, it became the word to describe all black people...Not until the seventeenth century was *Moor* slightly freed of the connotation of blackness, and this came about with the popularity of the term *white Moor*.¹¹⁹¹

Undeniably, both onstage and off, “black skin persisted as the most conspicuous marker of racial difference” in the culture; it was the most critical signifier of alterity.”¹¹⁹² But in the Middle Ages, there is a paradox in the representation of blackness, as well. “One of the most interesting characters in the Medieval mummers’ play was the king of Egypt, who had a black face.” By “tradition” he was “accepted as the father of St. George, the patron saint of England since the fourteenth century.”¹¹⁹³

“Medieval Christians were looking for allies against Islam, not justifications of black slavery”¹¹⁹⁴ and, conversely, in the non-Muslim black African, they created an improbable,

ally – even though “the presence of sub-Saharan Africans must have been exceedingly rare.”¹¹⁹⁵ This would account for “the ambivalent or even contradictory images of blacks in medieval Europe, because some of the “biblical images of black Africans” had them “associated them with exalted and non-servile roles.”

David Brion Davis, in *Inhuman Bondage* (2006), does an excellent job of synthesizing material of visual culture that has been collected and codified in Volumes I and II of Harvard University Press’ massive, multi-volume, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*: “the most extensively researched and documented publications relative to the depiction of blacks in Western Art in print to date.”¹¹⁹⁶ Davis’ inclusion of research in images from art history – he also draws on the work of Paul Kaplan, *The Black Magus in Western Art* – is indicative of an emerging trend among historians and literary scholars to recognize images, such as the omnipresent representation of the black magus who paid homage to the infant Christ, as cultural signifiers that reflect the collective consciousness of an age.

On the positive side, European artists in the late Middle Ages tended to picture Egyptians as at least dark or black-skinned and to include recognizable Africans in scenes of the Old Testament. There was also the favorable portrayal of the wealthy black king of Mali, based on thirteenth-century accounts of Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage to Mecca, laden with much gold and accompanied by black slaves. The Catalan Atlas noted that Mansa Musa was “the richest and noblest king in all the land.” In addition to gold, which was long one of African’s major attractions for European travelers and traders, the sub-Saharan regions were famous for legendary amounts of salt and copper. With respect to religion, news filtered northward of Ethiopian Christians, and by the early fifteenth century European artists had gradually accepted the idea of a black African magus, or wise man, in scenes of the Nativity.

Even earlier, we encounter the curious polarity of an armored black knight with distinctive and realistic African features—the heroic leader Saint Maurice. While the legendary Saint Maurice was supposedly from Thebes, by the mid-thirteenth century he had become a black man in armor, a black African leader of the Teutonic Knights! The remarkable sculptures and paintings of Saint Maurice that appear in churches and cathedrals in Germany and “Switzerland represented one of the supposed Christian leaders of the Holy Roman Empire’s crusade against the pagan Slavs to the east. The

black Saint Maurice was rivaled only by depictions of the black Queen of Sheba—and the black Virgin Mary.

There was, however, another representation of black Africans constantly on view for even the illiterate masses of Christian Europe. From the twelfth to the mid-fourteenth century, the iconography of western European churches become stocked with the images of unmistakably black Africans as torturers, tempters, and executioners, often in scenes of the Passion of Christ. It thus seems probable that most Europeans received the first subliminal impression of so-called Negroes in a local church or cathedral—the image of black death squads serving the devil, of the devil himself portrayed as an animalistic black man (usually without any African features) ¹¹⁹⁷

Additionally, in the Renaissance, these adumbrated medieval images representing blackness (for Queen of Sheba, see fig. 153) were informed, as we have seen, by the introduction of black people into the English social fabric; by written accounts of travelers to Africa, both ancient (in new translations) and contemporary; and by the images that were published with these chronicles; as well as by portraiture and visual commercial culture. ¹¹⁹⁸ However, it is not surprising that stereotypes of the “non-European, non-Christian” persisted, considering that much of the material Shakespeare and his contemporaries relied on for constructing their image of Africa and Africans “was independent of, and contrary to, empirical evidence.” In their process, they codified a polarization of identity that informed the literary and cultural imagination of early modern England. ¹¹⁹⁹ It is important to remind ourselves that these notions are completely derived.

The attitudes and thoughts concerning *primitive* Africans circling among the early modern English were founded in the Classical and Medieval geographical writings that still had a foothold in their consciousness and, therefore, still influenced intellectual conventions. There is no denying that there was a clear disdain for what was perceived to be *primitive*: the normative cosmology in the minds of the early modern English had always been that the further the distance people were physically located from the *civilized world*, the European

world, the more closely were those people allied with a savage bestiality. The recent discovery that the world was a globe, circular and not flat, must have been psychologically unsettling for Europeans who had to come to terms with the altered reality that they were no longer at the center of an existential plane with animated vectors radiating out from them.

In response to this shift in received hermeneutics, Europeans adopted a reflexive position of racial superiority based on *whiteness* as a strategy to protect them against a loss of status. They “took themselves as the norm and supposed that deviations, especially in something so obvious as skin colour, must be a signal of defect and God’s displeasure.”¹²⁰⁰

Constructing an Anthropology of Whiteness

The European early modern consciousness of a taxonomy of difference that inscribes Africans as not entitled to the benefits of the individual rights and freedoms that citizenship in the new world order implies was key to the comfort level that Europeans had with racialized slavery. Margaret T. Hodgen painstakingly tracks in her book, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1964),¹²⁰¹ the “imaginary portraits”¹²⁰² upon which these false constructs were based.

In order of influence, the vernacular Bible, and accounts of seafaring expeditions, are the primary sources that contributed to “the African image in the sixteenth century,” and, after that, it is the “ancients:” Herodotus, Isidore, Sallust, and, most importantly, Pliny. “To Herodotus Africans were ‘in countenance a like black, in hayre a like fryzeld’; to Pliny they were ‘al black saving their teeth, and a little the palme of their hands’”. It is in Pliny that we

find Othello's "Anthropophagi" and "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3. 57-58), along with any number of fantastical creatures.¹²⁰³

As Virginia Vaughan tells us:

Othello's yarns are symptomatic of the traveler's tales that circulated in England during the second half of the sixteenth century and beyond—narratives that ranged from mythical accounts of monstrous races and imaginary place to fact-filled reports of actual strangers and their remarkable homelands. Circulating in various written forms, and to a lesser extent, in visual embodiments on stages, in public and pageants, and occasionally in graphic arts, such representations fashioned in many English minds a host of exotic Others—the distant denizens of Asia, Africa, and the Americas.¹²⁰⁴

And Hodgen tells us that "Pliny's *Historia naturalis* is a bursting storehouse of information and misinformation thrown together hastily and indiscriminately."¹²⁰⁵ No wonder it is such a sensational and outlandish read, in the original Latin, and in its many retellings in translation, including one by Philemon Holland published in 1601, considered by some to be Shakespeare's source.¹²⁰⁶ Another contender is, a popular English version circulated widely after its publication in 1566; it was entitled *A Summarie of the Antiquities, and wonder of the Worlde*.¹²⁰⁷

Readers were told that some Ehtiopians had no noses, others no upper lips or tongues, others again no mouths. The Syrbotae were eight feet tall, The Ptoemphani were ruled by a dog. The Arimaspi had a single eye, in the forehead. The Agriophagi lived on the flesh of panthers and lions, the Anthropophagi lived on human flesh. There were people in Libya who had no names, nor did they ever dream. The Garmantes made no marriages; the men held the women in common. The Gamphasantes went all naked. The Cynamolgi ('dog-milkers') had heads like dogs' heads. The Blemmyes had no heads at all, but eyes and mouths in their breasts... 'The Laste of all the Affriens Southwarde', according to another book of the time, were the Ichthyophagi, or fish-eaters. 'Like vnto beastes', after a meal of fish wash'd up on the shore and baked by the sun, they would 'falle vpon their womn, euen as they come to hande withoute any choyse; vtterly voide of care ...¹²⁰⁸

Leo Africanus

Lois Whitney believed, and was the first scholar to point out back in 1922: “The readiest, best known, and most compendious source that Shakespeare could have turned to [to find the images from Pliny he used] was...Leo Africanus.”¹²⁰⁹ It was the most “complete ethnographic account of Africa circulating in Europe.” To reach the hands of monoglot Elizabethans, however, Leo’s book had to make its own journey (fig. 154): from the original Arabic into Latin, then into Italian, and finally into English as Vaughan¹²¹⁰ recounts:

John Leo, best known as Leo Africanus and a source of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, was able to differentiate among the peoples he described. Within his *Geographical Historie of Africa*, translated into English by John Pory and published in London (1600), are accounts of treacherous tawny people and virtuous blacks. Leo’s comparatively enlightened viewpoint reflects his own origins as an African Moor, albeit one converted to Christianity and living in Italy. His travel and adventures, including temporary slavery, have struck some modern commentators as similar to Othello’s. In any event, Leo could describe people “of a black colour” who were also people of a courteous and liberall disposition, and most friendly and bountifull vnto strangers.” Aware that Muslims had a variety of different cultures, Leo classified Africans not only by color but according to town and tribe. Some struck him as civilized, some as savage. Still, Leo accepted and purveyed the biblical explanation of blackness, claiming that “For all the Negros of balcke Moores take their descent from Chus, the sonne of Cham, who was the sonne of Noe. Leo’s *Description* does not pursue the negative implications of this assertion, but to the informed Elizabethan reader they would have been clear. Thus, even in Leo’s accounts of African people, signals were contradictory.¹²¹¹

“Leo Africanus also reports that Moors’ “wits are but meane, and they are so credulous, that they will beleeeve matters impossible, which are told them.” Iago reiterates this theme in his opening soliloquy:

*The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are. (1.3.398-401)*

“Othello’s epileptic fit demonstrates his passionate nature but it also marks him as the

member of an alien race. According to Leo Africanus, “This falling sickness likewise possesseth the women of Barbarie, and the land of the Negroes, who, to excuse it say that they are taken with a spirite.”¹²¹² The infamous handkerchief, upon which the plot turns in Othello also makes somewhat of an appearance in Leo’s *Historie*.

Whitney suggests that Shakespeare may have been introduced to Pory’s translation through Hakluyt. “But, however, this may be, the book contains so much which throws light on the character of Othello that it is hard to believe that Shakespeare was not acquainted with it.”¹²¹³ John Leo Africanus (fig. 155), the Granada born Moor is, in many respects, a stand in for Othello. Where they diverge, in one substantial, fact is in religion. “Africanus is strongly identified in England with his Moslem past, whereas Othello’s religious past is unclear.”¹²¹⁴ “In a somewhat poignant moment, this native informant and Christian *converso*, for whom African peoples are both ‘them’ and ‘us’ describes himself as an ‘amphibian’, thereby acknowledging his contradictory position as a denizen of both Muslim and Christian worlds, as both African and European, humanist scholar and ‘barbarian’”. Similarly, and all the more importantly, “Othello’s Africa is at once the place that authenticates his birth “from men of royal siege” (1.2.21-22) and “a wilderness of Plinian monstrosities.”¹²¹⁵

John Mandeville's Africa

“By the mid-1480s curiosity and experience joined opportunity, as Christopher Columbus began to delve into the work of Marco Polo, into the legends of Prester John, and into fabulous tales of the Orient. The most outrageous (and most entertaining) of these storytellers was one Sir John Mandeville.”¹²¹⁶ “*Mandeville's Travels*” was the most significant publication in the realm of regional and human geography to be published in England in the fifteenth [sic (fourteenth)] century,” and “it fired the imagination of ordinary intelligent people about the continent and its inhabitants.”¹²¹⁷

In his *Discoverie of Guina* (1596), Sir Walter Raleigh gives Mandeville good press.¹²¹⁸ Adding to these “assumed” sources, J. Milton suggests that there is a “startling resemblance” between the images of Africa and its as fantastical inhabitants, as described by Othello, and the “quaintly decorated Renaissance maps.” J. Milton French even goes so far as to suggest that Shakespeare was “most likely to have seen” the ones featured in Ptolemy’s *Geography*, which was widely available in multiple editions throughout the sixteenth century.¹²¹⁹

Africa, for early modern Englishman, was a world populated by people perceived to be distinctly unlike his Eurocentric sense of what was normative and acceptable to the status quo. This “brave new world” of Africa was viewed through the lens of Anglo cultural bias. The English processed, explained, categorized and indelibly defined Africans through a collision of cultures that branded difference as deficient: primitive, savage and pagan, on the African side, versus the civilized, cultured and Christian stalwart citizen of the realm on the English side.

The Ideologies of Color Prejudice

Shakespeare and his contemporaries “brought important cultural baggage to their encounters with foreign people: ideas about genealogy, about the biblical separation of humankind, and about the moral symbolism of color, all of which pushed them toward an essentialist reading of phenotype difference.”¹²²⁰ The collective body of image and material contributed to the documentable phenomenon of a burgeoning racist ideology that developed in the emblematic encounter of the white English with black people: “The sub-Saharan Africans’ ‘black skin and drastically unfamiliar custom and convictions, the evidence suggests, set them apart in English eyes and imaginations as a special category of humankind.”¹²²¹

From the start, the English were obsessed with the African’s skin color and speculated much on its cause and nature. Winthrop D. Jordan’s investigation in *White Over Black* into the semantic significance of black and blackness in British culture and how it impacted attitudes towards black people has become *de rigueur* for scholars of the period. Kim F. Hall whose book, *Things of Darkness*, is a popularly cited book on the representation of blacks in Britain in the early modern period, positions the discoveries and discourse on this topic as follows:

Peter Fryer, drawing from Winthrop Jordan, begins his discussion of the “demonology of race” with the dark/light polarity: “The very word ‘black’ and ‘white’ were heavily charged with meaning long before the English met people whose skins were black. Blackness, in England, traditionally stood for death, mourning, baseness, evil, sin and danger... White, on the other hand, was the color of purity, virginity, innocence, good magic, flags of truce, harmless lies, and perfect human beauty.”¹²²²

This associative response to blackness caused more than one Elizabethan Englishman to evoke as a “mediating term among these impinging concepts – *the devil*. As one observer declared, Negroes “in colour so in condition are little other than Devils incarnate.”¹²²³

The great advantage of Moors over Jews—or so it might seem to early modern Europeans—was that they could not so easily disguise their difference: blackness (as Aaron boasts in *Titus Andronicus*) “scorns to bear another hue” (4.2.99); and the ultimately reassuring them about George Best’s famous story of the English mother who gave birth to a black baby is that the taint of alterity seems compelled by nature to discover itself—“the blacke More,” as Scripture and proverb insisted, “[cannot] change his skin [any more than] the leopard can change his spotted,” for it was impossible “to wash the Ethiop white.”¹²²⁴

“The climactic explanation of the African’s pigmentation was commonplace,” as commented upon in the 1555 English translation of Jaonnes Boemus’s, *The Fardle of Fashion*.¹²²⁵ Dympna Callaghan offers the following theory on color difference that addresses the commonly held notion on the part of Europeans in the early modern period that black skin color was determined by a tropical climate.

Blackness, whether actual or cosmetic, was defined by an anterior whiteness just as the exotic in Renaissance systems of representation functioned as accident rather than essence. This is, the not-yet-systematic distinction between white and black finds itself expressed as ornament, as an overly of whiteness, not, in Winthrop Jordan’s famous phrase, “white over black,” but precisely its opposite, black over white. This understanding of negritude as an augmentation of whiteness stresses blackness *a representation*—that is, as an (anti) aesthetic as opposed to an essence—and was corroborated in the period by a climatic theory of racial difference, which proposed that blackness was an extreme form of sunburn.¹²²⁶

In 1984, Joseph R. Washington, Jr. published a stylistically nearly impenetrable, but exhaustive, disquisition, *Anti-Blackness in English Religion, 1500-1800*, on Christianity and the English social posture of anti-blackness and “anti-Black,” as in attitudes deeply opposed

to “Black” people.¹²²⁷ A consequence of these proscriptive views was the formulation of a Christian construct that supported the white European’s superiority based on “whiteness.” This myth was harnessed to excuse racialized slavery.

Winthrop Jordan supposes that the mass enslavement of black Africans by white Europeans was predicated on racism. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. takes the subtlety different position that the emergence of racism is “*simultaneous* with ‘racial’ slavery.”¹²²⁸ Both scholars agree that whites rationalized slavery based on essentialized prejudice. The English man subscribed to a belief system that had at its foundation an interpretation of the Bible that established a justifiable order of the world: the story of Noah’s curse on his son Ham, and Ham’s progeny, for trespassing on his father’s privilege, served as a convenient means of establishing the premise that God created black people to serve.¹²²⁹ “Ham had committed an offence against his father’s manhood; according to patriarchal logic, Ham is punished by the servile degradation of his issue.”¹²³⁰ This “primitive” view of the world was constructed around the medieval concept of “the Ptolemaic ‘threefold world which saw the continents as populated by the sons of Noah—Africa by the descendent of Ham, Asia by the sons of Shem, Europe by those of Japhet.’”¹²³¹ This “myth of the curse” was also, expediently, adopted in the Muslim world and enhanced by “Judaic and Christian sources.”¹²³²

Another construct in the advance of a racist ideology was a concept of “Otherness” based on the Elizabethan Englishman’s image of the African as savage, inhuman and bestial. It is Washington’s opinion that Othello is “deliberately caricatured as an African.”¹²³³ Jordan ... makes the point that the English discovery of the chimpanzee (then called “orang-outang”) coincided in time with northern Europe’s involvement with the African slave trade and first significant encounter with sub-Saharan West Africans, some of whom came from roughly the

same region as the chimpanzees. At a time when many educated people were moving away from (or had never been exposed to) biblical literalism, there was a widespread astonishment that animal-like chimpanzees could be so intelligent and communicative. Consequently, beginning in the late 1600s, there was much pre-Darwinian speculation on the relationship between Africans and apes (this was anticipated ... in some medieval Islamic literature).¹²³⁴

“Europeans and their offspring in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” comforted and absolved themselves for enslaving Africans by denying them their “full humanity,”¹²³⁵ which was achieved by “equating the black body with bestiality.”¹²³⁶ The consummation of Othello’s marriage is characterized as the mounting of a “Barbary horse” (1.1.110) “making the beast with two backs” (1.1.115) with his white bride, who is demonized by her association with “the Moor.”

The English were shocked in to the core of their Puritanical modesty and moral value system by the African’s lack of “proper clothing,” which reinforced an image of naked savagery and immorality.¹²³⁷ The English response to nudity at this time of the rise of the Puritan revolution was inextricably tied to the concept of original sin. But the unclothed body of the African created other self-induced problems for the white man. Comparing their own bodies to those of African men, prompted a profound anxiety in the early modern Englishman with respect to his own physical attributes. Iago expresses groundless, paranoid sexual insecurity concerning Othello:

IAGO. ... *I hate the Moor;
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if't be true,
But I for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety.* (1.3. 385-387)

The black man's "oversized penis" and the black woman's "hanging breasts" became a near obsession for the English. It also gave rise to the notion of the African as rapacious and predatory, promoting a rape myth/fantasy with respect to black men and white women, which is at the existential core of *Othello*. Desdemona's father "cannot believe that his daughter would 'run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / of such a thing as thou—to fear not to delight! (1.2.70-71) ... "At the root of his amazement and outrage is physical revulsion" imagining his 'fair' daughter in the 'gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' (1.1.120;124). Brabantio accusation that Othello has bewitched Desdemona; it is the only "rational" way for him to justify the marriage.¹²³⁸ According to Laurence Shore, "one cannot dismiss as historically inaccurate the Black Power perspective that the white man's flight into cultural neurosis," based in a large part on "his fear of black sexuality," is one of history's central themes.¹²³⁹ But the truth is that the English, like other Europeans, were equally as fascinated and attracted by Africans as they were revolted and threatened by the strong human representation of difference, signified by "blackness."

"[T]he symbolic process by which white writers imagine relations between whites and blacks, Toni Morrison calls 'playing in the dark.'"¹²⁴⁰ Blackness allows whites to practice identity, to act out their carnality on the debased black body. The construct of blackness concerns the use of stories of slavery and rejection "as a means of meditation – both safe and risky – on one's own humanity. The construct of blackness, of the "other," fortifies whites against their own fears of subjugation. Such analyses will reveal how the representation and appropriation of that narrative provides opportunities to contemplate limitation, suffering,

rebellion, and to speculate on fate and destiny ... ethics, social and universal codes of behavior, and assertions about and definitions of civilization and reason.”¹²⁴¹

Winthrop Jordan resolutely maintains that the great unnamed anxiety on the part of Europeans in the encounter between the black and white races is miscegenation: “That was the thing that touched in the raw white conscience.”¹²⁴² This fear is graphically expressed in *Othello*: ‘Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe!’, Iago jeers at Desdemona’s father (1.1.87-88). In contrast, however, underlying this “fear and loathing” was a paradoxically profound fascination with the exoticism of black Africans, who were subjected to, and “transformed” by, the Western *gaze*, into objects of allure, culminating in fantasies of sexual curiosity and longing. Arthur Little, in his fascinating, eponymously-titled book, tells us that, as a term, ‘jungle fever’ “refers most deprecatingly and popularly to whites who become sexually involved with black bodies,” and this was a powerfully present attraction in early modern England.¹²⁴³ The consequence was lethal. Jordan identifies “[p]assion for domination,” “sheer avarice,” and “sexual desire” as the reasons for the white man’s “conceiving and treating the Negro as inferior to himself.”¹²⁴⁴

These attitudes spawned acute racism; and Jordan’s seminal thesis is that this racism was the causal factor in the development of racialized chattel slavery in British North American. Arthur Little treats the same idea more brutally and graphically; “the issue of race finds itself frequently concerned with the issue of rape, which, even when committed by someone from within the community, is often ascribed to someone outside the community. In early modern drama, the black male frequently stands in this place, at least the symbolic place, of the rapist. Little goes on to say, “Western Imperialism has forged, and continues to forge, a natural racial and gender bond between the black male and rape.” At stake, is

protecting the literal and metaphorical “sanctity” of white women, who symbolize all the property rights of patriarchy. Little also suggests that the racism that attends this notion is compounded by sexism that imagines “the white woman, subconsciously, wishes to be raped.”¹²⁴⁵ Ultimately, it is about loss of control.

“Images of Othello’s violent and violable relationship to Desdemona are seen or implied throughout the play, and especially, in many later sensational pictorial representation.”¹²⁴⁶ Othello is a black man who must be destroyed for his transgression of marrying a white woman, because in such a union the social order and the future of the tribe are at stake. This is the powerful and prescient theme of Shakespeare’s tragedy. The play is a representation of one of the most critical developments in the public conscience of the early modern English, the concept of racial difference and prejudice based upon race, with the white man’s fear of the loss of racial “purity,” political dominance and cultural hegemony at its core. *Othello* illustrates the ways in which the English in the early modern period came to think of themselves as constituting a standard based on *whiteness* that must be upheld at all cost.

Othello is a reflection of the continent of Europe’s most profound identity crisis—contemporaneous with the beginning of the modern era—from which it has still not recovered: the world is not flat, and white people are not at its center. In response to this paradigmatic shift, Europeans adopted a reflexive position of racial superiority based on *whiteness* as a strategy to protect them against a loss of status. They “took themselves as the norm and supposed that deviations, especially in something so obvious as skin colour, must be a signal of defect and God’s displeasure.”¹²⁴⁷ Slavery is key to colonial dominance. “The conjunction

of modernity and slavery is awkward and challenging, since the most attractive element in modernity was always the promise it held out for self-realization.”¹²⁴⁸

Othello's Deniers

The pains certain critics take to deny the importance of the play, *Othello*, in the canon, and the dismissal of Othello's essential blackness, are, insentiently, a manifestation of cultural hegemony within the academy. These errors of omission represent the defeasance of colonial imperialism and slavery as serious political topics. That the protagonist of the drama is a black man seems almost to dictate an essentialist need to reduce the stature of this play and the scope of the human condition – the impact of identity and alterity – it represents. What is denied by making the play a “domestic” tragedy is Shakespeare's gift of finding the intensely moving private emotions in broad, societal dilemmas.

In the following passage from Russ McDonald's introduction to *The New Complete Pelican* edition, Othello, an *African* prince, is even deprived of the mere *consideration* that he *might* possess a “royal biography,” based only, it would seem, on skin color.¹²⁴⁹ And, yet, there were precedents for models of African royalty in Elizabethan culture: “English voyagers well before 1600” reported “contacts with West African kings like the king of Benin in ‘Negro-land.’” Furthermore, for years prior to 1604, there existed the fabulous tale of the, (previously introduced), mythological African Christian emperor, Prester John, who thrived as a legendary figure in the popular imagination as the King of the Ethiopians.¹²⁵⁰

[*Othello*] is sometimes described as the most dramatic, the most playable, of the great tragedies, but such praise often masks a dubious assessment of its artistic merits. Even those who most admire it, however, agree that *Othello* exhibits distinctive qualities that separate it

from its dramatic kin. First, its title character is different. The Moor of Venice differs conspicuously from the other tragic heroes, differs from the rest of the cast of *Othello*. The playwright takes great pains to depict Othello as the alien whose strangeness is both fascinating and threatening. Second, the play's subject is unusual for tragedy in that it is not a struggle for control of the state nor a study of ancient heroism, nor royal biography. Rather, *Othello* is about love—its beauty, its fragility, its vulnerability to hate. The passions represented seem private or perhaps narrow, not historically momentous. Here the battle for power is domestic, emotional, and personal.

I must aver from McDonald's position. *Othello* is, a priori, existential in its exploration of racial empiricism: it is about no less than the construction of racial identity. This is a momentous topic that has more meaning for the modern world than most. *Othello* is about the sundering of the world into factions of the colonizer and the colonized: the dominant white Europeans and the paradoxically feared and exploited, dark-skinned "Others." And to deny this play's powerful social themes, is both wrong and naïve. The entire premise behind Eldred Jones groundbreaking work back in the 1960s, *Othello's Countrymen*, was to expose "how greatly the Elizabethans knowledge of the continent and people's of Africa has been underestimated by modern critics."¹²⁵¹

In the European consciousness of the Renaissance, Moors, Turks and Africans were monolithically lumped together "as pagan."¹²⁵² As an exercise in constructing a plausible biography for Othello, I surmise that he was born a non-Muslim "pagan" in sub-Saharan Africa, and that the "insolent foe" (1.3.138) who took the young prince into slavery from his father's kingdom (1.2.22), was Muslim. We know that Othello took up arms at the age of seven (1.3.84), so he was likely a captive of some tribal war, potentially at a relatively young

age. In 1577 Richard Willes published the “anthology of travel literature” that Richard Eden did not complete before his death. In *The History of Travayle...* are to be found accounts of the “Negros” of the region along the river “Niger” where there were “pockets of Mohammedanism” among the “pure Gentyles [i.e. pagens] and Idoloatours, without profession of any religion, or other knowledge of God, then by the lawe of nature.”¹²⁵³ Consequently, Othello could have been a prisoner of black sub-Saharan Muslims of a neighboring community, and then sold into slavery to the North.

Whether Othello was forced to become a Muslim before he converted to Christianity, would be a factor in the circumstances of his bondage. Were Othello to have become the property of Muslims in Spain, it would have been compulsory for him to adopt the religion of Mohammed.¹²⁵⁴ This scenario is quite plausible considering the history of the Islamic slave trade, and I believe this double conversion was very likely Othello’s path: pagan to Muslim and then Muslim to Christian; he became a *morisco*.¹²⁵⁵ Considering Othello’s hatred of the Islamic “Turks,” it would make sense that he would carry animosity for Muslims, who had been his enslavers. There were also many blacks in Spain “when the New World was discovered,” and “some who had been trained in the Christian faith.” Furthermore, after “the attempt to use the natives of the West Indies as slaves threatened the speedy extermination of the whole race, its was decided to export from Spain negroes who had been trained in the Christian faith, and these were the first of the mighty multitudes of Africans to find their way to the colonial plantations.”¹²⁵⁶ Barbara Everett, makes a compelling case for Othello to have hailed from Spain in her article “‘Spanish’ Othello: the making of Shakespeare’s Moor”, but I think she is wrong to ignore that there were “Spanish-Africans” not just ‘Spanish’ and ‘Africans’, she is shortsighted to deny Othello’s blackness.¹²⁵⁷

“Roderigo, the epitome of Venice’s ‘curled darling’, describes Othello in the opening scene as an ‘extravagant and wheeling stranger/Of here and everywhere.’ Without a city of identification of his own.”¹²⁵⁸ “To be a Moor, he insists, is to be fundamentally dislocated creature, a wandering denizen of that un-place known as wilderness, heath, or *moor* – ‘an erring Barbarian.’”¹²⁵⁹

I believe that Nabil Matar has an agenda in his quest to segregate the non-black North African Muslims from black sub-Saharan Africans. By pulling the “white Moors” out from under the rubric of any confusion that arises from a shared identification with blacks through the labor “Moor,” he can avoid saddling North African Muslims with an associative brand of a ‘blackness’ that subjects them to a more onerous signifying construct than they already endure from the English as followers of Islam. Matar wants to control this unwelcome stigma in the perceptions of people of the West. He tells us in his introduction to *Turks, Moors and Englishmen* that “the conflation of North Africans with sub-Saharan Africans is misleading because England’s relations with sub-Saharan Africans were relations of power, domination, and slavery, while relations with the Muslims of North Africa and the Levant were of anxious equality and grudging emulation.” Most European of the time would probably not go that far in valuing “Turks”, but they did believe that “Africa (and the indigenous societies of the Americas) were on a significantly lower lever of development” than the “Moslem world.”¹²⁶⁰ Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that Christians and Moslems were locked in “a centuries-long struggle” for “a land and sea dominance of the Mediterranean.”¹²⁶¹ Matar identifies something deeper, though, at stake: “That is why it is important to distinguish between the English perceptions of ‘Moors’, ‘Blackamoors’, ‘Negroes’ and others—not only to clarify

English differentiations of color and religion, but to identify the relations of power and colonization.”

Playthell Benjamin makes the case that narrowly reductive thinking about skin color is false. He points out the obvious, but critically overlooked truth, that “North African Moorish complexions ranged from light bright, near-white Arabs, to coal-black Sudanese.” (Benjamin 1997, 95). It cannot be denied that there were both “white Moors” *and* there were “black Moors,” as Leo Africanus explains. The same holds true today in a shocking way. “Though Mauritania formally abolished slavery in 1981, Arab white Moors in the country still hold an estimated tens of thousands of black Moors, who are Afro-Mauritanian, as slaves—or in what the US State Department prefers to call the “vestiges of slavery.” The government “overlooks a 12th-century practice in a 21st-century world.”¹²⁶² But just as “Moor” came to be associated with black in Renaissance England,¹²⁶³ many scholars now have difficulty accepting “Moor” to mean anything other than “near-white Arabs.” Benjamin identifies this trend as a serious deficiency in Shakespearean scholarship, compounding earlier generations that were simply in race denial, or worse.

Those who persist in the argument that Shakespeare did not intend Othello to be a Negroid type, a genuine black man, take on a burden of proof that cannot be supported by the text. Here myriad ignorances converge in an unholy alliance that provide license for uninformed prattle to masquerade as scholarly discourse. There is ignorance of the geography and ethnography of Africa; the racial characteristics of the Moors who invaded southern Europe and occupied the Iberian Peninsula for over seven centuries; the history of black – white relations in Shakespeare’s England; and the literary nuances employed by Elizabethans to distinguish between blacks and mulattos [, and Turks].”¹²⁶⁴

Even scholars acutely conscious of alterity, who write about the representation of race— have difficulty with Shakespeare’s usage of “Moor” to represent a black man. Ania Loomba perpetuates the flawed theory of reductive thinking. She makes the assumption that a Moor in Spain had skin lighter than that of sub-Saharan Africans, but darker than Northern Europeans.¹²⁶⁵ There is a reason for this unfortunate endorsement of the cliché that denies the diversity of North Africans; it also gainsays the presence of sub-Saharan Africans in Islamic Spain and after the fall. Plus, it harkens back to the persistent conventional belief that there was no black African presence in Britain in his time to have influenced Shakespeare.

The Moorish Ambassador

“In 1956 the Shakespeare Institute acquired a portrait of the Moorish Ambassador to Elizabeth in 1600.” These are the opening words of Bernard Harris’ 1958 essay published in *Shakespeare Survey* under the title, “A Portrait of a Moor,” that is reprinted in *Shakespeare and Race*, edited by Catherine M.S. Alexander and Stanley Wells.¹²⁶⁶ The portrait of the Ambassador from Mauritania was painted to commemorate his rather lengthy sojourn, with retinue, in London, late in the Queen’s reign. Harris’ thesis is that the image in the portrait of the “Moorish Ambassador” represents the only “Moor” that Elizabethan’s, including Shakespeare, would have encountered as a “real,” (as distinct from a “fictional”), character. “We know that [Othello] is black and a Moor, and that the Elizabethans were inexact in their use of the terms ‘Moor’ and ‘negro,’” states Harris. And since the Ambassador is the only true Moor that Shakespeare could have studied, (Harris continues), then Adb el-Ouahed ben Massoud ben Mohammed Anou, (as the diplomat is called), must be what Shakespeare meant

Othello to look like.¹²⁶⁷ Furthermore, since the Moorish Ambassador, as portrayed in the portrait, is clearly not a black African, but a “white moor”, that is, an ““olive-coloured‘ North African Moor.”¹²⁶⁸ “This picture (fig. 156) presents ‘ocular proof’ of what the Elizabethans saw as a Moor of rank, one whose presence with his companions in London a year or so before the usually agreed date of *Othello* caused much contemporary comment.”¹²⁶⁹ Why he is considered a prototype for Othello and not the Prince of Morocco strikes me as downright scholarly neglect. Because as we well know. There is no truth to the assumptions that undergird these views.

Stephen Schmuck believes that although it is sometimes hard for us to understand fully the distinctions and all the references from our present day perspective, “Elizabethan and early Jacobean Englishmen and women conceived of Moors and ‘Turks’ as two complex, interrelated, yet distinct figures.”¹²⁷⁰ And what the portrait “testifies to the close diplomatic relations between the English and the Moroccan court,”¹²⁷¹ Queen Elizabeth, “who shared Moroccan fears of Spanish power,” was in correspondence with the Moroccan courts.” Nonetheless, Harris’ article has proved widely influential.

As Phyllis Braxton rightly demonstrates, the textual evidence that Othello is “black in color” is, “of course, conclusive” Othello calls himself “black: [(3.3.267)] and describes his face as “begrin[e]d and black” [(3.3.390)]; Iago likens him to “an old black ram” [(1.1.87)] and refers to him as “black Othello” [(2.3.29)]; Brabantio notes his “sooty bosom” (1.2.70); the duke, praising Othello’s character, tells Brabantio that “your son-in-law is far more fair than black” [(1.3.291)]; and Roderigo initially sets Iago to thinking in terms of race when he characterizes Othello to Iago, by the feature common to native Africans and their descendants, as “the thick lips” [(1.1.65)].¹²⁷² Furthermore, “Brabantio’s sneering reference to “bond slaves

and pagens” (1.2.99) seems to be an oblique attempt to sully the reputation of the redeemed slave and baptized Christian Othello.”¹²⁷³

To recap. Shakespeare’s text tells us that Othello is a Moor, who is black. He is a Christian convert. He is the son of “royal siege,” who was enslaved by the “insolent foe.” He is now a general for hire in Venice, where he is a foreigner. And he is made the Governor of Cypress by the Venetian state to combat the Turks. Braxton, like Barbara Everett, thinks that the “details of [Othello’s] portrayal have a uniquely Spanish source.”¹²⁷⁴ There are men in history who share Othello’s back story: sub-Saharan black Africans who were enslaved by Muslims, transported to Moorish Spain, where they were forced to adopt Islam, and where they were trained as elite soldiers. Many gained their freedom. Some converted to Christianity. Leo Africanus is not an anomaly, there were other sophisticated, by European standards, black people in the early modern period.

Othello Mythopoesis

Shakespeare can appropriate all the sources he wants in the construction of his version of *Othello*, but what makes this play important literature is what the author does with his materials of opportunity through the invention of his imagination. *Othello* deals with the crucial theme of identify and self-definition in the face of growing evidence that what the self represents is only a circumscribe aspect of human possibility. In the Age of Expansion, all the peoples of the world were confronted with alterity. For every standard there was a deviation, and the encounters among fellow human beings, drastically different in language, creed, culture, custom, and, especially, color could be both frightening and challenging. In response

to this existential crisis, the white European, (through force abetted by technology), established himself as the norm, and consigned everyone else to a hierarchy of inferiority, based on degrees of perceived difference. At the bottom of the order, he placed the black African; and, he harnessed his God to rationalize and justify these actions. Ever since, this racial construct has defined the modern world through colonial imperialism, with terrifying consequence.

NOTES

⁹¹⁴ See Brendan Bradshaw and P. R. Roberts, eds., *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Susan Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603* (London: Penguin Books, 2000); Nicholas P. Canny and Elaine M. Low, *The Oxford History of the British Empire Vol. 1: The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Leo Frank Solt, *Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509-1640* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁹¹⁵ J. H. Elliott, *Spain, Europe & the Wider World, 1500-1800* (New Haven [Conn.]; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 3–6.

⁹¹⁶ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 1983).

⁹¹⁷ Robert Zaller, *The Discourse of Legitimacy in Early Modern England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 17.

⁹¹⁸ Folio.

⁹¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁹²⁰ Bate, *Soul of the Age*, 14.

⁹²¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 8. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 8.

⁹²² William Shakespeare (1564-1616), British dramatist, poet. Chorus, in *Henry V*, prologue, 1.11-4. The “wooden O” refers to multi-sided theaters like the Globe, where Shakespeare's plays were staged; “casques” means helmets.

⁹²³ Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge [u.a.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), ix.

⁹²⁴ Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From "Alcazar" to "Othello"* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 21.

⁹²⁵ Salces 1996: 173; See, Disney, "The Disaster of Al-Ksar Al-Kabir," 16–20.

⁹²⁶ "The central Portuguese figure in Elizabeth's war with Philip... was Dom Antonio, the Portuguese Pretender. When Dom Henry, the "Cardinal King," died in 1580 leaving no heirs to the Portuguese throne, Dom Antonio, the Prior of Crato, exerted his right to the crown. Philip too had a legitimate claim to the throne and, moreover, an army to back it up. Portugal was annexed to the Spanish empire, and Dom Antonio repaired to England to seek support among Philip's enemies. The English victory over the Armada in 1588 gave the Portuguese Pretender hope of recovering the crown. His cause was championed by Protestant heroes like Sir Francis Drake and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, while the merchant marranos [conversos] of London lent their economic and political support by providing funds and strategic information." E. V. Campos, "Jews, Spaniards, and Portingales: Ambiguous Identities of Portuguese Marranos in Elizabethan England," *ELH -BALTIMORE-* 69 (2002): 599–616.

⁹²⁷ T. S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan Foreign Trade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 139.

⁹²⁸ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, 122.

⁹²⁹ Elliott, *Spain, Europe & the Wider World*, 27-28.

⁹³⁰ The Black Legend in England.

⁹³¹ Solt, *Church and State in Early Modern England*.

⁹³² Jordan, *White over Black*, 30.

⁹³³ Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

⁹³⁴ Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 19–21.

⁹³⁵ Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400–1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100.

⁹³⁶ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800*, 2. Dr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 66; See also Peter C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁹³⁷ See Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise*. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor*, 21.

⁹³⁸ Allison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 14, 12.

⁹³⁹ Canny, *The Origins of Empire*, 1. Bradshaw and Roberts, *British Consciousness and Identity*, 1–2.

⁹⁴⁰ Canny, *The Origins of Empire*, 423–424.

⁹⁴¹ Canny, *The Origins of Empire*, ix.

⁹⁴² “Rule, Britannia!” is a British patriotic song, originating from the poem “Rule, Britannia” by James Thomson and set to music by Thomas Arne in 1740. Lyrics: *Rule Britannia! / Britannia rules the waves / Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

⁹⁴³ F. O. Shyllon, *Black People in Britain: 1555–1833* (London; New York: Published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, 1977), 1. See also, Slights, “Just as English culture simultaneously promoted and denied slavery, so it exhibited contradictory understanding of the nature of slaves and slavery. In a country where all the except the monarch were subjects, and words such as *subject* and *serve* rarely had pejorative connotations, subjection itself was not disgraceful... But, recognition of the actual contingency of slavery coexisted with a concept of the natural slave, incapable of honor.” Camille Wells Slights, “Slaves and Subjects in Othello,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1997): 382.

⁹⁴⁴ Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Review of The First Quarto of “Othello,”* by Scott McMillin, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2002): 549–50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844242>. See Scott McMillin, *The First Quarto of Othello* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005). See also, Internet Shakespeare Editions, “Othello, Quarto 1 (1622), Facsimile Info,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/overview/book/Q1_Oth.html.

⁹⁴⁵ Folio: A book in which the sheets are folded in half only once, creating two double-sided leaves.

⁹⁴⁶ Internet Shakespeare Editions, “First Folio (Brandeis University), Page 818, Compared to Othello, Quarto 1 (British Library), Facsimile Viewer,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/comparator/Bran_F1/818/BL_Q1_Oth/; See also Folger Shakespeare Library, “Publishing Shakespeare,” Text, *Folger*

Shakespeare Library, (December 15, 2014), <http://www.folger.edu/publishing-shakespeare>; See also The British Library, “Shakespeare’s First Folio,” accessed September 17, 2017, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/shakespeares-first-folio>.

⁹⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, Burton Raffel, and Harold Bloom, *Othello (The Annotated Shakespeare)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xxxiv.

⁹⁴⁸ William Shakespeare and Charlton Hinman, *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, 2nd ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

⁹⁴⁹ Leah S. Marcus, “The Two Texts of ‘Othello’ and Early Modern Constructions of Race,” in *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare’s Drama*, ed. Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23; 32.

⁹⁵⁰ Fair = White.

⁹⁵¹ Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 17–18; See also Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen*.

⁹⁵² See “Agas” map of London. The Agas map can be viewed on the website - <http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/copyright.php> - by kind permission of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of the City of London, Aldermanbury, London, UK EC2P 2EJ. The corner of Monkwell (sometime Mugwell or Muggle Street) and Silver Street can be viewed in section B5 on the website. “Now the city being like a vast sea, full of gusts, fearful-dangerous shelves and rocks, ready at every storm to sink and cast away the weak and unexperienced bark . . . I, like another Columbus or Drake . . . have drawn you this chart or map for your guide as well out of mine own as my many friends experience. Henry Peacham, *The Art of Living in London, or, A Caution How Gentlemen, Countreymen and Strangers Drawn by Occasion ...* (S.l: Printed for Iohn Gyles and are to be sold by Samuel Rand, 1642).

See Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 47. Nicholl has written an extensively researched, highly entertaining account gleaned from a 1612 Court of Requests lawsuit for which Shakespeare provided a signed deposition. (It is the only extant record of Shakespeare documented speaking in his own words.) It is from Shakespeare’s deposition that it can be documented that Shakespeare lived with the Mountjoys. We do not know precisely for how long, but Nicholl demonstrates that we can be positive that Shakespeare was a lodger at least between the years 1603-1605. From this legal record Nicholl has pulled together a fact-grounded speculation on the writer’s life over a three-year period when England was on the cusp of royal dynastic change, 1603 – 1605. In these years Shakespeare wrote among other plays, “Macbeth,” “All’s Well That Ends Well” and “Measure for Measure,” and “Othello.” But Shakespeare lived in the City of London or its liberties most of his adult life, 1564 -1616. The records are slim but we know Shakespeare was an established writer by 1594 and he left the capital to retire in Stratford a few years before he died.

See also William Grimes, “The case, long known to scholars, can be briefly

summarized. Christopher and Marie Mountjoy, French immigrants who made the plumelike fashion accessories known as head tires, looked forward to the marriage of their daughter, Mary, to their apprentice, Stephen Belott. Worried that the lad might not go through with it, Marie asked Shakespeare to intervene, apply a little pressure and, in an avuncular role, preside over a formal exchange of vows. This he did, and the marriage took place, followed eventually by a lawsuit when the stingy father-in-law failed to make good on his promises of a dowry.” William Grimes, “The Tenant Who Wrote ‘Macbeth,’” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/books/08book.html>.

⁹⁵³ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 17.

⁹⁵⁴ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 19.

⁹⁵⁵ Duncan Salkeld, “Citizen Shakespeare,” *Times Literary Supplement Online*, accessed May 26, 2006, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/incomingFeeds/article670179.ece.

⁹⁵⁶ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 57-70.

⁹⁵⁷ Negars and Blackamoors were colloquial names for people of African descent. For the imprecision and interchangeability of the derogatory stereotypes “Moor” and “blackamoor” as used in historical accounts and imaginative literature see Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46–47.

⁹⁵⁸ “**11 July 1596. PC 2/21, f. 304: An Open Letter about 'Negroes' Brought Home** An open le[tt]re to the L[ord] Maiour of London and th'alermen his brethren, And to all other Maiours, Sheryfes, &c. Her Ma[jes]tie understanding that there are of late divers Blackmoores brought into the Realme, of which kinde of people there are all ready here to manie, consideringe howe God hath blessed this land w[i]th great increase of people of our owne Nation as anie Countrie in the world, wherof manie for want of Service and meanes to sett them on worck fall to Idlenesse and to great extremytie; Her Ma[jesty']s pleasure therefore ys, that those kinde of people should be sent forthe of the lande. And for that purpose there ys direction given to this bearer Edwarde Banes to take of those Blackmoores that in this last voyage under Sir Thomas Baskerville, were brought into this Realme to the number of Tenn, to be Transported by him out of the Realme. Wherein wee Req[ui]re] you to be aydinge & Assyting unto him as he shall have occacion, and thereof not to faile.” ...

“**18 July 1596. PC 2/21, f. 306: 'Those kinde of people may be well spared.** An open warrant tot he L[ord] Maiour of London and to all ~~other~~ vyceadmyralles, Maiours and other publicke officers whatsoever to whom yt may appertaine. Whereas Casper van Senden a merchant of Lubeck did by his labor and travell procure of her Ma[jest's] subiectes that were detayned prisoners in Spaine and Portugall to be released, and brought them hither into this Realme at his owne cost and charges, for the w[hi]ch his expences and declaration of his honest minde towardses those prizoners, he only desireth to have lycense to take up so many Blackamoors here in this Realme and to transport them into Spaine and Portugall. Her

Ma[jes]ty in regard of the charitable affection the supli[ant] hathe shewed being a stranger to worke the delivery of our contrymen that were there in great misery and thraldom and to bring them home to their native contry, and that the same could not be don w[i]thout great expence and also considering the reasonableness of his requestes to transport so many Blackamoors from hence doth thincke yt a very good exchange and that those kinde of people may be well spared in this Realme being so populous and numbers of hable persons the subiects of the land and xpian [Christian] people that perishe for want of service, whereby through their labor they might be mayntained. They are therefore in their L[ordshi]ps' name req[ui]red to aide and assist him to take up suche Blackamoors as he shall finde w[i]thin this Realme w[i]th consent of their masters, who we doubt not considering her Ma[jesty's] good pleasure to have those kindes of people sent out of the lande & the good deserving of the stranger towards her Ma[jesty's] subiectes, and that they shall doe charitable and like Christians rather to be served by their owne contrymen then with those kynde of people, will yilde those in their possession to him.” The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/elizabeth.htm.

⁹⁵⁹ “c. **January 1601. Licence to Deport Black People** *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. 3, pp. 221-* WHEREAS the Queen's majesty, tendering the good and welfare of her own natural subjects, greatly distressed in these hard times of dearth, is highly discontented to understand the great number of Negroes and blackamoors which (as she is informed) are carried into this realm since the troubles between her highness and the King of Spain; who are fostered and powered here, to the great annoyance of her own liege people that which co[vet?] the relief which these people consume, as also for that the most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel: hath given a special commandment that the said kind of people shall be with all speed avoided and discharged out of this her majesty's realms; and to that end and purpose hath appointed Casper van Senden, merchant of Lubeck, for their speedy transportation, a man that hath somewhat deserved of this realm in respect that by his own labor and charge he hath relieved and brought from Spain divers of our English nation who otherwise would have perished there.

These shall therefore be to will and require you and every of you to aid and assist the said Casper van Senden or his assignees to taking such Negroes and blackamoors to be transported as aforesaid as he shall find within the realm of England; and if there shall be any person or persons which be possessed of any such blackamoors that refuse to deliver them in sort aforesaid, then we require you to call them before you and to advise and persuade them by all good means to satisfy her majesty's pleasure therein; which if they shall eftsoons willfully and obstinately refuse, we pray you to certify their names to us, to the end her majesty may take such further course therein as it shall seem best in her princely wisdom.” The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online, Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/elizabeth.htm”

⁹⁶⁰ “Elizabeth made an arrangement for a merchant, Casper van Senden, to deport Black people from England. In 1596 she licensed him to deport 89 Black people to Spain and

Portugal, in exchange for 89 English prisoners, held in those countries, whom (it is said) he had brought back to England at his own expense” The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/elizabeth.htm

⁹⁶¹ Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England and the Performance of Titus Andronicus at Burley-on-the-Hill, 1595/96.”

⁹⁶² Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England,” 298.

⁹⁶³ David Dabydeen, *The Black Presence in English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1986), 17; For the issue of an immigrant colored minority becoming the national scapegoat for an economic problem and Shakespeare's ironic response to this issue through the figures of Launcelot and the Mooress in *The Merchant of Venice*, see Kim F. Hall, “Reading What Isn’t There: Black Studies in Early Modern England,” *Stanford Humanities Review* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 22–33.

⁹⁶⁴ Bartels, “Too Many Blackamoors,” 306.

⁹⁶⁵ Bartels, “Too Many Blackamoors,” 306-307.

⁹⁶⁶ Bartels, “Too Many Blackamoors,” 308.

⁹⁶⁷ “The central Portuguese figure in Elizabeth’s war with Philip... was Dom Antonio, the Portuguese Pretender. When Dom Henry, the “Cardinal King,” died in 1580 leaving no heirs to the Portuguese throne, Dom Antonio, the Prior of Crato, exerted his right to the crown. Philip too had a legitimate claim to the throne and, moreover, an army to back it up. Portugal was annexed to the Spanish empire, and Dom Antonio repaired to England to seek support among Philip’s enemies. The English victory over the Armada in 1588 gave the Portuguese Pretender hope of recovering the crown. His cause was championed by Protestant heroes like Sir Francis Drake and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, while the merchant marranos [conversos] of London lent their economic and political support by providing funds and strategic information.” Campos, “Jews, Spaniards, and Portugales,” 603-604.

⁹⁶⁸ “The Dassells were suspected of smuggling a considerable number of Guinea slaves into England. This is borne out by the accusation laid by Dom Antonio before the High Court of Admiralty against Anthony Dassell and his brother Thomas in 1592. Dom Antonio accused the Dassell brothers of having ‘cast in prison the king of Portingall his agent,’ that is, his own Guinea agent, and of having “transported” to England two Africans “against the king[e] of that realme and his officers comma[u]ndements” The two Africans were said to be ‘cheife yonge negroes, ... sonnes to the cheife justice of that contrey.’ Dom Antonio and the English authorities, therefore, feared that the Dassells' fraudulent practices would bring about ‘the utter overthrow[e] and disturba[u]nce of that trade in those partes,’ and awaken ‘the prejudice of other marchants of that societie, by reason wherof’ the queen and Dom Antonio

were bound to lose ‘ten thousand[e] crownes yearlye.’ (Nunes Costa, Document 40). Richard Kelley was one of the Guinea merchants who disapproved of Anthony Dassell's behavior. He was afraid to return to Guinea because he believed that the two ‘Neygrose of some accompt’ had been taken to England ‘against their wills.’ He argued that ‘by suche indiscreete dealinge it is greatlye to be feared that the trade into those partes wilbe very muche hindred.’ He was, therefore, not ready to return to Guinea unless ‘some order be taken for the saffe bringinge backe of the sayde ij Negrose into the sayde countrye’ (National Archives, Kew, HCA 24/59/49-51). (28.) Nunes Costa, document 43, pp. 776-78. A copy of the same document is also kept at the National Archives, at Kew, HCA 24/59/45-46. Evasion of duties was rampant among merchants and slavers operating on the upper Guinea coast. Under the Hispano-Portuguese regime the colony went through the golden years of trade in slaves and ivory.” Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England, 28;” See also Walter Rodney, “Portuguese Attempts at Monopoly on the Upper Guinea Coast, 1580-1650,” *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 307–22, doi:10.2307/180170.

⁹⁶⁹ Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England.”

⁹⁷⁰ “In his defense, Anthony Dassell countered that the ‘two yonge negroes they of themselves made sute to come, and voluntarie came to see England without any compulsion,” adding that their ‘good entertaynment heere wil be more benefificiall and comodius’ to the queen ‘in regarde of the trade then all the serva[u]nts” of Dom Antonio “canne doe good in goinge thither.’ And to justify his blatant breach of the Guinea charter he went to the length of invoking the example set by the French, who had been trading in Guinea “above thirtie yeares” without paying ‘duties’ to their king. No ‘nation’ was ‘better beloved nor so well wellcome to the negroes” as the French, who “cheifflye proceded by bringinge negroes nowe and then into France and usinge them well (Nunes Costa, Document 41).” Ungerer, “The Presence of Black People in Elizabethan England, 28.”

⁹⁷¹ For more on the expulsion edicts see, James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 13; Walvin, *Black and White*, 8–9.; Carole Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), chap. 6.

⁹⁷² It was becoming the fashion for the wealthy to acquire black attendants merely for their exoticism. This person may have been a dwarf. Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 170.

⁹⁷³ Walvin, *The Black Presence*, 13.

⁹⁷⁴ “104. Declaration of John Hill of Stonehouse, Plymouth. I was taken near Bayonne, in Dec. 1595, and have been since prisoner in the Groyne, with six others. I was liberated, 26 Jan. last, on condition of bringing to the Groyne **two negroes taken by Capt. Clements of weymouth**, or certifying why they could not be obtained. At Ferrol lie 100 ships, but unfurnished, and there is great sickness among the men. They were expecting 50 galleys to

defind their coast, for since Christmas, they have been expecting 150 English ships to invade them, and all the towns and castles are garrisoned; I heard of no shipping preparing to invade this realm. I beg favour for procuring **one of the negroes with Lady Raleigh**, that I may specially return to the Groyne, for which all we poor prisoners shall be grateful.” Great Britain and C. S. Knighton, eds., *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series of the Reign of Mary I, 1553-1558, Preserved in the Public Record Office*, Rev. ed (London: Public Record Office, 1998), <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/4115635>; Word Gloss: A Coruña (Spanish: La Coruña; **Galician**: A Coruña; also Corunna in English, and archaically **The Groyne**) is the second largest city in **Galicia** in Northwestern Spain; For the ‘Blynd More,’ one of the musicians in Leicester’s service in 1559, see Simon Adams, *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1558-1561, 1584-1586* (London; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁹⁷⁵ Marika Sherwood, “Blacks in Tudor England,” *History Today* 53 (2003): 40–42.

⁹⁷⁶ For Grace Robinson and John Morocco see, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 8; See also, Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago: Johnson, 1972), 23, for Grace Robinson and John Morocco.

⁹⁷⁷ Royal Collection Trust, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017, “Paul van Somer (c. 1576-1621) - Anne of Denmark (1574-1619),” *Royal Collection Trust*, accessed September 17, 2017, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405887/anne-of-denmark-1574-1619>.

⁹⁷⁸ Peter Erickson, “Invisibility Speaks: Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Visual Culture,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 24, 2009): 23–61, doi:10.1353/jem.0.0027.

⁹⁷⁹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 18.

⁹⁸⁰ Harry Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins: Queen Elizabeth’s Slave Trader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹⁸¹ St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1991), 271.

⁹⁸² Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, vol. 2, xix.

⁹⁸³ Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, 7.

⁹⁸⁴ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, vol. 2; Preface, xi.

⁹⁸⁵ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, vol. 2; Preface, xi.

⁹⁸⁶ There is 1575 painting by Marcus Gheeraerts of Queen Elizabeth and her court that includes a group of black musicians and dancers. “Yet whether these performers were the Queen's attendants, those of her hosts or itinerants is not known.” Sherwood, “Blacks in Tudor England.”

⁹⁸⁷ Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 128; referencing Ethel Carlton Williams, *Anne of Denmark*, 1970.

⁹⁸⁸ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 3–4.

⁹⁸⁹ Ania Loomba, “Shakespeare and Cultural Difference,” in *Alternative Shakespeares - Volume 2*, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 181, also referencing Ethel Carlton Williams.

⁹⁹⁰ Using as her source Robert Lindsay and Ae. J. G. Mackay, *The Historie and Chronicles of Scotland, from the Slauchter of King James the First to the Ane Thousande Fyve Hundreith Thrie Scoir Fyftein Zeir* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966).

⁹⁹¹ Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-3.

⁹⁹² College of Arms (Great Britain) and Sydney Anglo, *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster. A Collotype Reproduction of the Manuscript. With an Historical Introduction by Sydney Anglo, Etc.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). See also www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, “From the 15th century there was a growing desire to depict spectacles and ceremonials and record them for posterity. Henry VIII wanted such a pictorial record made of his tournament to mark the birth of his male child. He commissioned the Westminster Tournament Roll, a unique treasure held at the College of Arms. It is a pictorial illuminated manuscript, a continuous roll approximately 60 feet long. It is a narrative of the beginning, middle and end of the tournament, which took place over two days. In the Westminster Tournament Roll, the king occupies a prominent position. Henry is shown surrounded by a host of footmen, officials and dignitaries, a mace bearer, a crowd of nobles, the officers of arms and six trumpeters. Among the latter is a Black man. He appears twice on the Roll: once on the way from the court and again on the way back. According to the historian Sydney Anglo, he is almost certainly John Blanke, the 'blacke trumpeter' mentioned in the Treasurer's accounts.” The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/elizabeth.htm

⁹⁹³ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 4-5.

⁹⁹⁴ “Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, (Annual 2008). The Portuguese

court, I think, was the chief purveyor of black servants to the early Tudor royal household and possibly to the Scottish court.” Gustav Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit: Jacques Francis and the Salvage Operations of the ‘Mary Rose’ and the ‘Sancta Maria and Sanctus Edwardus’, 1545–ca 1550,” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005): 255–71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24322730>.

⁹⁹⁵ “Africans have been present in Europe from classical times. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries Roman soldiers of African origin served in Britain, and some stayed after their military service ended. According to the historians Fryer, Edwards and Walvin, in the 9th century Viking fleets raided North Africa and Spain, captured Black people, and took them to Britain and Ireland. From the end of the 15th century we begin to see more evidence for the presence of **Black Moors** in the accounts of the reign of King James IV of Scotland, and later in **Elizabethan England**. ...

King James IV (1473-1513) and the Black Moors of his Court.

King James IV of Scotland came to the throne in 1488. He was an able and visionary monarch whose administration united and maintained order in the Scottish highlands and lowlands. He encouraged manufacturing and shipbuilding, and created a navy. James IV also renewed Scotland's alliance with France, although in 1503 he took an English wife, Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII of England. James was a popular, fun-loving king with many interests. Many Black Moors were present at his court. Some worked as servants or (possibly) slaves, but others seem to have been invited guests or musicians. We know that he courted Margaret with lute and clavichord recitals and took her out hunting and playing sports.

After their marriage, the king's Lord High Treasurer's accounts provide numerous entries to show how much he enjoyed lively entertainment, employing foreign minstrels from Italy and elsewhere. King James was generous to all kinds of people, including Black Moors, as ... entries from the Treasurer's accounts demonstrate:

After James IV's death at Flodden in 1513 during the Franco-Scottish invasion of England, fewer references to Africans appear in the accounts. Interestingly, however, in 1594, during the reign of James VI, a richly attired Black Moor was paid to help pull the chariots during celebrations to mark the birth of James's eldest son, Henry Frederick. Nothing more is known about this man except that he lived in Edinburgh.” The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/elizabeth.htm

⁹⁹⁶ Sherwood, “Blacks in Tudor England.”

⁹⁹⁷ Walvin, *The Black Presence*, 13.

⁹⁹⁸ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*.

⁹⁹⁹ Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England.”

¹⁰⁰⁰ James Anthony Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 6.

¹⁰⁰¹ Nigel Goose and Liên Luu, “‘Xenophobia’ in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England: An Epithet Too Far?,” in *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (Eastbourne, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 127–28.

¹⁰⁰² Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833*, x. See also Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). This book remains after forty years the best history of the origins and development of English and American racism. For a discussion of the Great Chain of Being, see specifically Chapter VIII: “The Negro Bound by the Chain of Being,” 482-509. The Great Chain of Being dates from classical times and came to be adopted as a worldview of western medieval thought. It conventionalizes the order of the universe as a strict hierarchical system with God at the top, the angels beneath him, and then down through the natural orders with man preeminent as a sentient creature just below the angels.

¹⁰⁰³ Henry Bynnyman (1578) in J. Burton and A. Loomba, *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (Springer, 2007), 108. Later republished by Richard Hakluyt in sections relating to Frobisher’s search for a northwest passage. Hakluyt’s was the compiler, editor and publisher of documentary evidence of Tudor voyages in the sixteenth century and seventeenth century *age of discovery*, most particularly contemporary travel narratives. In 1582, he published *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America*, but his three-volume *magnum opus* was *The Principal Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoueries of the English Nation* (1598, 1599 and 1600). Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* contained all chronicles of the time to date relating to the early Tudor seafaring expeditions. It was Hakluyt, more than anyone, who exhorted his fellow countryman to the urgency of empire, a Protestant British Empire. Hakluyt’s was a call to the English to preserve their nation from the threat of the Catholic Spanish Empire. His gathering of texts that evoked the heroic exploits of Englishman past and present was a strategy to construct an English national identity around colonization and conquest.

¹⁰⁰⁴ “Native West Africans probably first appeared in London in 1554: in that year five ‘Negroes,’ as the legitimate trader William Towerson reported, were taken to England, ‘kept till they could speake the language,’ and then brought back again ‘to be a helpe to Englishmen’ who were engaged with traders on the coast.” Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 6. Towerson’s account, as quoted in Jordan, can also be found in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 176, 200, 217-18.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden*, 12-14.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 72. PRO, STAC 8/297/12, MS 9080E.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Stews = Brothels.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ungerer, "The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England." Ungerer is quoting from Duncan Salkeld's review of Michael Neill's edition of Shakespeare's *Othello* in *The Times Literary Supplement*: Duncan Salkeld, "For that He is Black," *Times Literary Supplement Online*, accessed August 18, 2006, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/incomingFeeds/article617108.ece.

¹⁰¹⁰ Duncan Salkeld, "Black Luce and the Curtizans of Shakespeare's London," *Signatures* 2 (Winter 2000), https://www.academia.edu/1951732/Black_Luce_and_the_Curtizans_of_Shakespeares_London.

¹⁰¹¹ Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 11.

¹⁰¹² [dingy brown] (OED)

¹⁰¹³ Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, 233.

¹⁰¹⁴ Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 269.

¹⁰¹⁵ Stews = Brothels.

¹⁰¹⁶ Sharpe, *Early Modern England a Social History*, 220.

¹⁰¹⁷ G. B. Harrison and William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare under Elizabeth* (H. Holt & Co.: New York, 1933), 310.

¹⁰¹⁸ Agnes Strickland, *Life of Queen Elizabeth* (London ; New York: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; E. P. Button & Co., 1910), 588.

¹⁰¹⁹ Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise*, 8-9. We know Shakespeare frequented the Inn's of Court. His comedy *Twelfth Night* premiered before Queen Elizabeth, at the Middle Temple of the Inn's of Court and report has it, the playwright was in attendance.

¹⁰²⁰ Welsford, *The Fool*, 197.

¹⁰²¹ Francis Davison, Henry Helmes, and Francis Bacon, *Gesta Grayorum* ([London Printed for the Malone society by F. Hall at the Oxford University Press], 1914), <http://archive.org/details/gestgrayorum00grayuoft>.

¹⁰²² Salkeld, "Black Luce and the Curtizans of Shakespeare's London," 388.

¹⁰²³ John Leslie Hotson, *Mr. W.H. Identifying Mr. W.H., to Whom the First Edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets Was Dedicated*. (Rupert Hart-Davis: London, 1964).

¹⁰²⁴ Salkeld, "Black Luce and the Curtizans of Shakespeare's London."

¹⁰²⁵ Imtiaz H. Habib, *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (Lanham; New York; Oxford: University Press of America, 2000).

¹⁰²⁶ Turnbull Street, sometimes Turnmill Street was known for its prostitutes and brothels. Clerkenwell was a notorious neighborhood.

¹⁰²⁷ "**May 28. (1599) Hampton.** 119. Denis Edwards to Thos. Lankford, secretary to the Earl of Herford, or to Mr. Cross, clerk of the kitchen. I want you to show his Lordship this Spanish news, which I had from a credible man, who was master with Capt. Copper. John Borley, and two others remain prisoners at the Groyne until they have such Spaniards as be in England. Pray **enquire after and secure my negress; she is certainly at the "Swan," a Dane's beershop, Turnbull Street, Clerkenwell.**" Great Britain and C. S. Knighton, eds., *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series of the Reign of Mary I, 1553-1558, Preserved in the Public Record Office*, <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/4115635>.

¹⁰²⁸ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 68-69.

¹⁰²⁹ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 212.

¹⁰³⁰ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 197-239.

¹⁰³¹ Peter Ackroyd, "The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street by Charles Nicholl," *Times Literary Supplement Online*, accessed November 23, 2007, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article2929975.ece.

¹⁰³² J.F. Merritt, ed., *Imaging Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), sec. Introduction, 11.

¹⁰³³ Information obtained on a site visit to the Museum of London, June 2008. Museum of London, London Wall, London, EC2Y 5HN.

¹⁰³⁴ Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, 15.

¹⁰³⁵ Alden T. Vaughan. *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2006), 10-12.

¹⁰³⁶ Ungerer, "The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England, 20."

¹⁰³⁷ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 24.

¹⁰³⁸ “The major difficulty in gathering reliable information has proved the absence of a regulated slave trade in early modern England. Whereas in Portugal and Spain the import of slaves was a government monopoly, England disposed of no legal code for operating a slave system under the Tudor monarchs. Hence there were no customs duties levied on imported slaves. There was, however, an annual per capita tax. This was, in effect, a poll tax of 8d levied by the municipal authorities.” Ungerer, “The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England,” 19. For the Portuguese complaints about the superfluity of slaves and alleged disruption of economic stability see A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48; and Didier Lahon, “Black African Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal during the Renaissance: Creating a New Pattern of Reality,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and Kate J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261–79.

¹⁰³⁹ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, Vol.1, 24. A new study has suggested these figures need to be revised upwards. See Ivana Elbl who concludes that the estimates “hitherto suggested by modern scholars” should be raised. “The study concludes that Europeans exported approximately 156,000 slaves from Atlantic Africa between 1450 and 1521. ... The overall pattern of trade suggests that the African slave supply was very responsive to European demand but that Europeans’ success in the slave trade depended on their competitiveness and on the market appearance of their goods, as they were seldom the only available buyers.” Elbl, “The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521,” 31–75. This confirms John Thornton’s thesis in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 73–116.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Eltis, *Europeans and the Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 5–6.

¹⁰⁴¹ Little, *Negroes in Great Britain*, 195.

¹⁰⁴² Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: History Book Club, 2005), 314. See also C. S. L. Davies, “Slavery and Protector Somerset; The Vagrancy Act of 1547,” *The Economic History Review* 19, no. 3 (1966): 533–549; 548, doi:10.2307/2593162. *Quasi* slave status for a black person in England or in the New World was one thing, the enslavement of “fellow citizens”—that was proven a totally “foreign concept” in Tudor society. In 1547, Protector Somerset, “as part of a novel concept of social legislation” added “the penalty for ‘slavery’ into his Vagrancy Act of 1547.” It was a measure that could muster no enthusiasm – a toothless law that was soon repealed. There was no stomach for slavery in England in 1547. See Robin Blackburn. Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 56–57.

¹⁰⁴³ Gustav Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 261.

¹⁰⁴⁴ W. E. Miller, "Negroes in Elizabethan London," *Notes and Queries* 8, no. 4 (1961): 138; and R. E. G. Kirk, Ernest F. Kirk, and Huguenot Society of London, *Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to That of James I* (London: Huguenot Society, 1998), iii; 28; 54. See also Fryer, *Staying Power*, 9.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 96.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), who estimates this number to be around 300. Also see M Kaufmann, "Sir Pedro Negro: What Colour Was His Skin?," *Notes and Queries* 55, no. 2 (2008): 146. Kaufmann has documented three hundred records over the course of the sixteenth century in yet unpublished research. She acknowledges her data to be an incomplete record of the actual black presence, which means any estimate would be higher.

¹⁰⁴⁷ **“Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section:** People of African and Asian origin have lived in Britain for at least two thousand years, but this aspect of our heritage has been largely forgotten. Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section has launched a project to find Black and Asian Londoners in the records we hold. We invite all our readers to participate and let us know their findings, either in our reading room or by e-mail. So far, we have found 207 entries, the earliest in 1586 and the latest in 1896, mostly in registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, but also in probate records. This is an ongoing project, so do come back to look for entries again, as all further entries found by our readers will be added in.

The entries will be useful for researchers investigating the Black and Asian history of London (and further afield, especially the British factory at Oporto, Portugal), but also for people tracing their family tree who have Black or Asian ancestors. For further information about sources elsewhere, see the Black and Asian Studies Association website at www.blackandasianstudies.org.uk/interface.htm, and the National Archives' (in conjunction with BASA) black history website at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/. We are interested in collecting the records of Black and Asian individuals, businesses and communities within the square mile of the City of London and we welcome anyone who has such records or knows of them contacting us at manuscripts.guildhall@corpoflondon.gov.uk. Dr. Imtiaz Habib and Marika Sherwood are associated with this project. Last updated 29th July 2008.” “Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section - Black and Asian Entries,” accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/baentries.htm>.

¹⁰⁴⁸ See “Samuel Pepys: Diary, Letters, Family Tree, Maps, Encyclopedia, Discussion and More,” accessed September 17, 2017, <https://www.pepysdiary.com/>.

¹⁰⁴⁹ “Please note: the survival rate of records varies from parish to parish The Manuscripts Section of Guildhall Library is the local record office for the City of London (the "Square Mile"), although the records of the City of London Corporation are separately administered. During the medieval period there were over 100 parishes within the City and

the Manuscripts Section holds the surviving records of all but two of these City parishes. The following list of parishes and non-parochial chapels within the City does not include any covering dates or any information on indexes, transcripts or Bishop's transcripts. Further information about these can be found in City of London Parish Registers (Guildhall Library 1999).” “Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section - Black and Asian Entries.”

¹⁰⁵⁰ Records of nearly all the City's ancient parishes are held in the Guildhall Library. They include registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, churchwardens' accounts, vestry minutes, rate assessments, inhabitants' lists, and poor law, charity and estate records. “Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section,” accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/baentries.htm>.

¹⁰⁵¹ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 69.

¹⁰⁵² Liên Luu, “Alien Immigrants to England: One Hundred Years On,” in *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, ed. Nigel Goose and Liên Luu (Eastbourne, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 223.

¹⁰⁵³ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 94–95.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 185.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Luu, “Alien Immigrants to England,” 227.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Liên Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects: Aliens and Their Status in Elizabethan London,” in *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, ed. Nigel Goose and Liên Luu (Eastbourne, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 58.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 96.

¹⁰⁵⁸ As quoted in Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 181.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Campos, “Jews, Spaniards, and Portugales,” 611-612. See A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in ... Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁶⁰ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 59.

¹⁰⁶¹ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 58-59.

¹⁰⁶² Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 89.

¹⁰⁶³ For this reason Christopher Mountjoy rented and did not own his properties. See Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 60.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 66.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 72.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Goose, “‘Xenophobia’ in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,” 123.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Nicholl, *The Lodger Shakespeare*, 25, 37-38.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 61; 64.

¹⁰⁷⁰ As quoted in Goose, “‘Xenophobia’ in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,” 125. See *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, J.R. Dasent (ed.), 1596-7, 16-17 and 20-1. John Roche Dasent, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England: New Series. Volume XXV. Volume XXV*. (Burlington, Ont.: TannerRitchie Pub. in collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St. Andrews, 2009), 16-17; 20-1.

See also D’Ewes, *Compleat Journal*, 509. Simonds D’Ewes, Willson Havelock Coates, and Frederick John Kingsbury Memorial Fund, *The Journal of Sir Simonds D’Ewes, from the First Recess of the Long Parliament to the Withdrawal of King Charles from London*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942), 509.

¹⁰⁷¹ Goose, “‘Xenophobia’ in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,” 125-126.

¹⁰⁷² Luu, “Natural-Born versus Stranger-Born Subjects,” 60.

¹⁰⁷³ Conversos (Spanish and Portuguese for “a convert,” from Latin *conversus*, “converted, turned around”) referred to Jews or Muslims or the descendants of Jews or Muslims who had converted or, in most cases, were compelled to convert to Catholicism in Spain and Portugal, particularly during the 14th and 15th centuries. Morisco for New Christians of Moorish origin. The term *morisco* may also refer to Crypto-Muslims, i.e. those who secretly continued to practice Islam. “Morisco,” *Wikipedia*, September 14, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Morisco&oldid=800512336>. Marrano for New Christians of Jewish origin. The term *marrano* may also refer to Crypto-Jews, i.e. those who secretly continued to practice Judaism. “Marrano,” *Wikipedia*, September 17, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Marrano&oldid=801039718>.

¹⁰⁷⁴ James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 70.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Campos, “Jews, Spaniards, and Portugales,” 601–602.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 1.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 72.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ungerer, "The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England," 32–33. The case of Ireland is an example of racism rooted in national and cultural differences rather than phenotypic or religious ones, and it is helpful for understanding Elizabethan attitudes towards Jews since, unlike the Moor, the Jew can "pass" as a white European. National origin, then, plays a large role in anti-Semitic racism since the Jews most likely to be encountered in England were Iberian refugees. Hence, I would argue that some aspects of English anti-Semitism can be interpreted as transposed anti-Hispanic racism. 601-602

¹⁰⁷⁹ For the physician's purchase of the Ethiopian see Knutson, "A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry." For documentary information on Dr. Hector Nunez see Lucien Wolf, "Jews in Elizabethan England," *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 11 (1924): 1–91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29777765>.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ungerer, "The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England," 33.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ungerer, "The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England," 34.

¹⁰⁸² Ungerer, "Recovering a Black African's Voice in an English Lawsuit," 261; 270. Ungerer regarding Jacques Francis' slave status, "instead of telling the court that he was the "servus" of Piero Paolo Corsi, with whom he had been staying for two years (ca. February 1546 to February 1548), [Francis] chose to inform the judges that he was his "Famulus," obviously giving preference to a term that meant slave member of a household rather than enslaved captive. The record of the commercial transaction between Corsi and Francis's former master as it must have been registered by a local notary of Southampton has not come down to us, but there is little doubt that it must have existed. In support of this assumption one can adduce as a former instance the case of Maria Moriana, the Moorish servant of the Italian merchant Filippo Cini who had hatched a base plot to sell the manumitted Maria in Southampton in the 1470s." Ungerer continues, "The case is well documented. Maria Moriana with the help of some Italian acquaintances appealed to the Lord Chancellor, lamenting her ignorance of English and Latin and complaining about the ingratitude of her master. See Ruddock, 126-27. The only other case of a black servant freed in England known to me occurred in 1490, when king Henry VII manumitted the Portuguese "Pero Alvarez negro e forro." Alvarez returned to Portugal where king John II acknowledged his manumission, granting him the right to settle in his kingdom as a freedman. See Pedro A. d'Azevedo, "Os Escravos," *Arquivo Historico Portuguez* 1 (1903): 289-307, doc. iii." Ungerer, "Recovering a Black African's Voice in an English Lawsuit," 261; 270.

¹⁰⁸³ "The country of his origin, the "Insula de Gynney," can be identified as Arguin Island off the coast of Mauretania where the Portuguese had established their first trading post (feitoria) in 1445. Right from the very beginning of the island's integration into the nascent Portuguese empire, Arguin enjoyed the administrative status of a separate agency. This

singularity would seem to rule out the islands of Sao Tome and of Principe in the Gulf of Guinea.” Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 261.

¹⁰⁸⁴ “The only naval historian to have drawn attention to the disaster and to the black Guinea diver is Alwyn A. Ruddock, *Italian Merchants and Shipping in Southampton 1270-1600*.” Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 268.

¹⁰⁸⁵ The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/settlers.htm

¹⁰⁸⁶ The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/settlers.htm

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 261. See Ungerer’s note 25. “The ‘fala da Guine’ came into being in Portugal as a vehicle for communication between the slaves imported from Africa and the Portuguese population. What was originally the product of the slaves’ response to the new realities was eventually appropriated by the Portuguese dramatists of the fifteenth century and by the Spanish playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a sign of racial difference and cultural inferiority. The ‘lengua de negro’ or ‘habla guinea’ became a stock marker of inferiority in the Spanish drama of the Golden Age. See Baltasar Fra Molinero, *La imagen de los negros en el teatro del Siglo de Oro . . .*” Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 269. Jacques Francis’ statement was translated by the interpreter John Tyrart. See Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*, 12; 99; 168; 169.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 263.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 264.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 256.

¹⁰⁹¹ The National Archives, “Exhibitions & Learning Online - Black Presence, Early Times,” accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/settlers.htm

¹⁰⁹² Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 264.

¹⁰⁹³ Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain*, 191.

¹⁰⁹⁴ “I am currently investigating to what extent Thomas Malliard, Robert Thorne, Roger Barlow and other English merchants were operating as slaveholders and slave dealers

in Seville, Sanlucar de Barrameda and Cadiz in the opening decades of the sixteenth century.” Ungerer, “Recovering a Black African’s Voice in an English Lawsuit,” 267.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Little, *Negroes in Great Britain*, 188.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 6.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Elliot H. Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550–1688* (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall, 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Sharpe, *Early Modern England a Social History*, 220.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 5.

¹¹⁰⁰ Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850*, 8.

¹¹⁰¹ Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*, 20; Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 1.

¹¹⁰² Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 56-57; 61-62.

¹¹⁰³ “**September 1567. 7. John Hawkyns to the Queen.** The Portuguese who were to have directed them in their enterprize, have fled. Will undertake it himself. The voyage which he contemplates is ‘**to lade negroes in Genoya’ [Guinea], and sell them in the West Indyas, in truck of golde, perles, and esmeraldes.**’ [*The origin of the slave trade.*] SS original editors notes.” *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, 1547-80*. Edited by Robert Lemon. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1856. *British History Online*, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1547-80>.

¹¹⁰⁴ Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro*, 30.

¹¹⁰⁵ Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 1.

¹¹⁰⁶ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 10.

¹¹⁰⁷ Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 1.

¹¹⁰⁸ Shyllon *Black People in Britain*, 1.

¹¹⁰⁹ Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 1.

¹¹¹⁰ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 12.

¹¹¹¹ Discuss own archival work in National Archives. Discuss the Vaughans’ project.

¹¹¹² Include Vaughan's discussion of his work in documents on American Indians in England

¹¹¹³ *St. Botolph Without Aldgate*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://eastlondonhistory.com/st-botolphs/>.

¹¹¹⁴ *St. Olave Hart Street*, accessed 17 December, 2008, www.web.sadds.btinternet.co.uk/HartSt/hartst.html.

¹¹¹⁵ *St. Andrew Holborn*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.standrewholborn.org.uk/history.html>.

¹¹¹⁶ *St. Botolph Without Bishopsgate*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/stbotolphwithoutbishopsgate.htm>.

¹¹¹⁷ *St. Ann Blackfriars*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/stannblackfriars.htm>.

¹¹¹⁸ *St. Stephen Coleman Street*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/coleman.htm>.

¹¹¹⁹ *St. Mary Woolchurch Haw*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/stmarywoolchurchhaw.htm>.

¹¹²⁰ "St. Mary Bothaw," *Wikipedia*, September 7, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mary_Bothaw&oldid=799350685.

¹¹²¹ "St. Benet Fink," *Wikipedia*, June 3, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Benet_Fink&oldid=783607744.

¹¹²² *St. Mildred Poultry*, accessed 17 December, 2008, www.combs-families.org/combs/records/england/lnd/stmildredpoultry.htm.

¹¹²³ *St. Dunstan in the West*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.stdunstaninthewest.org/homepage.htm>.

¹¹²⁴ *St. Dionis Backchurch*, accessed 17 December, 2008, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Dionis_Backchurch.

¹¹²⁵ "Holy Trinity the Less," *Wikipedia*, June 15, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Holy_Trinity_the_Less&oldid=785751349.

¹¹²⁶ “St Katharine’s by the Tower,” *Wikipedia*, September 1, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Katharine%27s_by_the_Tower&oldid=798438766.

¹¹²⁷ *St. Giles Cripplegate*, accessed June 15, 2017, <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/england/london-st-giles-cripplegate.htm>.

¹¹²⁸ David Loades, “Winter, Sir William (c.1525–1589),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29769>.

¹¹²⁹ All records indicate that John Davies was a member of St. Mary Woolchurch Haw. There is no explanation to account for why this church was not the site of the baptism. “**1599/1600** Davies is churchwarden at Mary Woolchurch Haw: among his payments are 2s 4d twice to ‘goodman Androwes’ for whipping 7 vagrants (20 Nov), 7 rogues (14 Dec) and 2s for 6 persons (23 Apr 1600); 30 April, Davies paid 8s for his ‘Awdet dinner’ (Churchwardens’ Accounts, **GHL, ms. 1013**) ... **1612, 29 June** ‘Margaret the wife of Mr Iohn Davies was buried on mondaie the xxixth of Iune (**GHL, ms. 7644**, St Mary Woolchurch Haw) On 18 Nov of 1611 a Margaret Davies presented an apprentice, Cudwallader Roberts. On 30 June, Davies paid £1 2s. 6d. ‘for breaking the ground in the middle Ile for Mrs Davis and for the knell and peales’ (Churchwardens’ Accounts, **GHL, ms. 1013**).” *John Davies, Haberdasher, 1560?-1627*, accessed 8 January, 2008, www.ualr.edu/rlkknutson/davies.html.

¹¹³⁰ “**John Davies, Haberdasher, 1560? – 1627. 1597, 24 April-20 May** "a blakmore belonging to Mr Iohn Davies died in White chappel parishe, was Laid in the ground in this church yarde. Sine frequentia populi et sine ceremonijs quia vtrum chrystianus esset necne nesciebamus [without a crowd of people and without ceremony whether or not he was {might have been} a christian we do not know] (**GHL, ms. 7644**, St Mary Woolchurch Haw).” ... “**1600, 28 May** William Shute, an imbroderer (Broderers’ Company), sues John Davies and Isaac Kilburne (**Req.2/86/14**); cause of action: Davies owned the Prosperus and sold 1/6th of it to Shute ("one sixth parte of the good shipp called the Prosperous of London of the burden of two hundreth and Twenty Tonnes or thereaboutes, as of the Boate, skyffe, mastes, sayles, sayleyardes, Anchors, Cables, ropes, cordes, apparrell, Tacle, Ordinaunce, munycion, furniture, rightes, profittes, and necessaries to the same shippe in or about the thirteenth day of December in the seaven and thirtieth yeare of yor highnes most gracious Raigne"). Shute also loaned Davies money so that his account with Davies = £461 4s. 7d.; now Davies has lost the "deed of Bargaine and sale" of the 1/6th part of the ship, and (Shute claims) with confederates Kilburne, John Robinson, and Thomas Redwood, means to defraud Shute of his bargain ("they or some of them have contrived and made vnto themselves and others kiuers and sundry secrett Conveyaunce of the said sixth parte and so meane and intend to defraude and deceaue [Shute] thereof contrary to all equity and good conscience, by meanes whereof [Shute] is not onely vtterly destitute and voyde of any security for the said some of foure hundreth sixty-one poundes, foure shillinges & seauen pence"). In addition, the June before [1599], Shute loaned & delivered 4 pieces of ordinance called Sakers out of the ship, which

Davies promised to return or replace within ten days; value of ordinance = £40 3s.; witnesses to the taking of the ordinance have now scattered to "places remote and vnknowne" (France, Ireland). Davies answers (June 1600). He calls the suit frivolous and malicious; he agrees that he sold the 1/6th part of the ship, but claims no money is owed; he thinks Shute has the "lost" deed of sale. He agrees that he owes Shute something, but nothing like what Shute claims; he did take the ordinance, but considered it partial payment from Shute for the 1/6th; he is willing to restore it if it will enable the ship to sail. Davies appears to claim that it is Kilburne who actually put up the money for the 1/6th part of the Prosperus. Kilburne confirms this; Kilburne goes on to say that Davies signed the 1/6th part over to him because of debts Davies had already accumulated with Kilburne, and that he (Kilburne) did not know Shute had any part in the business; Kilburne also denies any conspiracy to defraud Shute. Shute's replication (Oct 1600) reaffirms his claim." ... "**1608, 1609**: Port Books show lading for the *Abigail* (**E.190.14/4, E.190.15/2**) **1610, Midsummer**: the *Abigail* sets sail for Guinea (charter: 14 July.)" *John Davies, Haberdasher, 1560?-1627*, accessed 8 January, 2008, www.ualr.edu/rlkknutson/davies.html.

¹¹³¹ "**1611, Midsummer** the *Abigail* sails again to Guinea; in July, the ship is attacked by pirates (Captain Peter Peck and Captain John, both Hollanders); the pirates take their lading and seven persons as prisoners (Lewis Davis, factor & mariner; William Halle, ship's carpenter; one Bartelmewes, mate; John Gillett, cook; William Jackson, surgeon; Nicholas Speartman, boatswain; "and a Youth called Iohn" (**HCA1/47/279, HCA 1/47/235**). The High Court of the Admiralty made an inquiry into the incident, primarily to determine what goods were lost, what happened to the goods after they were taken, and whether the men taken by the pirates had gone willingly and subsequently served willingly on the pirates' ship. In the collective testimony of William Milles, master of the ship (**HCA1/47/235**, 30 September 1611), William Halle, carpenter (**HCA1/47/274v**, 30 March 1612), Lewis Davis, factor and mariner (**HCA1/47/279**, 24 April 1612), Edmund Towers, merchant and factor for Davies (**HCA1/47/290**, 17 June 1612), and Thomas Glasier, factor in London for the *Abigail* (**HCA1/47/291**, 17 June 1612), the Court learned that the *Abigail* was on the coast of Barbary when it was attacked; that the ladings included cloth, iron, kettles, manicles, silks, satins, broadcloth, cotton cloth, linen cloth, woolen cloth, brass rings, axes, brass basins, brass kettles, bugles, wines, and acquavita (**HCA1/47/235, HCA1/47/290**); that Peck and John attacked other ships after the *Abigail*, including the English ships the *Bark Reynolds* and the *Minion*, three ships from Newfoundland laden with fish (which the pirates didn't want), a West Indies (or Spanish?) ship laden with tobacco, sugar, and hides (**HCA1/47/280**); that they sold their ill-gotten goods in Mamora in Barbary (except for the brass rings, which didn't sell); that Davis and Halle were able to escape (the pirates released Davis in Rotterdam; Halle jumped ship in Mamora after 4 months with the pirates and stole aboard the English ship, the *Portsmouth*, and got safe passage home [**HCA1/47/274v**]); that Davis earned 28s. while with the pirates by making them clothes." *John Davies, Haberdasher, 1560?-1627*, accessed 8 January, 2008, www.ualr.edu/rlkknutson/davies.html.

¹¹³² See Knutson, "A Caliban in St. Mildred Poultry," 110–26.

¹¹³³ See notes 99 and 100.

¹¹³⁴ John Gouws, “Greville, Fulke, first Baron Brooke of Beauchamps Court (1554–1628),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11516>.

¹¹³⁵ In Tudor England “the ‘Morescoes;’ were the blackfaced, often royal and aristocratic, actors in mummers' plays, miracle plays, morris dancing, and masques.” Loomba, in *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, 28.

¹¹³⁶ Edgar Samuel, “Nunes, Hector (1520–1591),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, accessed 17 December, 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40773>.

¹¹³⁷ Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama*, ix.

¹¹³⁸ *Othello*, 1.3.40; Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, “Before Othello: Elizabethan representations of sub-Saharan Africans,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 30.

¹¹³⁹ Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, ix.

¹¹⁴⁰ As quoted in Vaughan, *Othello*, 1994, 59.

¹¹⁴¹ *Othello*, 2.3.78-79.

¹¹⁴² *Othello*, 2.1.1-2.

¹¹⁴³ As quoted in William Shakespeare and E. A. J. Honigmann, *Othello* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1996), 15.

¹¹⁴⁴ Loomba, “Shakespeare and Cultural Difference,” 180.

¹¹⁴⁵ *Othello*, ed. Russ McDonald (Penguin Group US, 2002), 1394.

¹¹⁴⁶ Slights, “Slaves and Subjects in Othello,” 389.

¹¹⁴⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 351.

¹¹⁴⁸ Orlando Patterson, “Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness? — By Touré — Book Review,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2011, sec. Sunday Book Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/books/review/whos-afraid-of-post-blackness-by-touere-book-review.html>.

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- ¹¹⁴⁹ Edles and Appelrouth 354).
- ¹¹⁵⁰ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 79.
- ¹¹⁵¹ G. K. Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition: Studies in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, Liverpool English Texts and Studies (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978), 55.
- ¹¹⁵² Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 13.
- ¹¹⁵³ Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 1.
- ¹¹⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Ernst A. J. Honigmann.
- ¹¹⁵⁵ Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, 20.
- ¹¹⁵⁶ M. R. Ridley, ed., *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: Othello* (Methuen and co. and Harvard University Press, 1962).
- ¹¹⁵⁷ Ridley, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*.
- ¹¹⁵⁸ Ridley, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, sec. Introduction.
- ¹¹⁵⁹ Playthell Benjamin, "Did Shakespeare Intend Othello to Be Black? A Meditation on Blacks and the Bard," in *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*, by Mythili Kaul (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 96.
- ¹¹⁶⁰ Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*, 17–18.
- ¹¹⁶¹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1993).
- ¹¹⁶² Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*, Accents on Shakespeare (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 92.
- ¹¹⁶³ Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 190.
- ¹¹⁶⁴ Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women*, 76.
- ¹¹⁶⁵ *Othello*, ed. Russ McDonald (Penguin Group US, 2002), 1393.

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- ¹¹⁶⁶ Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women*, 76.
- ¹¹⁶⁷ Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 167.
- ¹¹⁶⁸ Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 180–1.
- ¹¹⁶⁹ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 2–4.
- ¹¹⁷⁰ Emily C. Bartels, "Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1990): 438, doi:10.2307/2870775.
- ¹¹⁷¹ Bartels, "Making More of the Moor," 439.
- ¹¹⁷² Bartels, "Making More of the Moor," 438.
- ¹¹⁷³ Bartels, "Making More of the Moor," 439.
- ¹¹⁷⁴ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 30.
- ¹¹⁷⁵ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 30.
- ¹¹⁷⁶ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 10.
- ¹¹⁷⁷ Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, 1.
- ¹¹⁷⁸ Slights, "Slaves and Subjects in Othello," 382.
- ¹¹⁷⁹ Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama*, ix.
- ¹¹⁸⁰ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 143–66.
- ¹¹⁸¹ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 79.
- ¹¹⁸² Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 147.
- ¹¹⁸³ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 17.
- ¹¹⁸⁴ Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition*, 37.
- ¹¹⁸⁵ Loomba, "Shakespeare and Cultural Difference," 180–181.
- ¹¹⁸⁶ Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 10.

¹¹⁸⁷ Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2002), 216.

¹¹⁸⁸ Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England*, 215.

¹¹⁸⁹ Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England*, 215.

¹¹⁹⁰ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 29.

¹¹⁹¹ Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 12.

¹¹⁹² Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women*, 78.

¹¹⁹³ Jones, *Othello's Countrymen*, 28.

¹¹⁹⁴ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 69.

¹¹⁹⁵ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, 58–59.

¹¹⁹⁶ Bindman, Gates, and Dalton, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.

¹¹⁹⁷ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery*, 58.

¹¹⁹⁸ Peter Erickson, *Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 10.

¹¹⁹⁹ Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 14.

¹²⁰⁰ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 78.

¹²⁰¹ Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 1964).

¹²⁰² Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 14.

¹²⁰³ Jones, *Othello's Countrymen*, 2; 11.

¹²⁰⁴ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 20.

¹²⁰⁵ Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 35-40.
Hodgen

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- ¹²⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Ernst A. J. Honigmann, 5.
- ¹²⁰⁷ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 4-5.
- ¹²⁰⁸ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 6-7.
- ¹²⁰⁹ Lois Whitney, "Did Shakespeare Know Leo Africanus?," *PMLA* 37, no. 3 (September 1922): 474).
- ¹²¹⁰ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 40.
- ¹²¹¹ Vaughan, *Othello*, 1994, 54.
- ¹²¹² Vaughan, *Othello*, 1994, 68.
- ¹²¹³ Lois Whitney, "Did Shakespeare Know Leo Africanus?," *PMLA* 37, no. 3 (September 1922): 470, doi:10.2307/457156.
- ¹²¹⁴ Bartels, "Making More of the Moor," 436.
- ¹²¹⁵ Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 362.
- ¹²¹⁶ Reston, *Dogs of God*, 128.
- ¹²¹⁷ Jones, *Othello's Countrymen*, 5.
- ¹²¹⁸ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 22.
- ¹²¹⁹ Joseph Milton French, *Othello among the Anthropophagi* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1934), 807.
- ¹²²⁰ Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 366.
- ¹²²¹ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 21.
- ¹²²² Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 9.
- ¹²²³ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 24.
- ¹²²⁴ Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 364.
- ¹²²⁵ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 23.

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- ¹²²⁶ Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women*, 79.
- ¹²²⁷ Joseph R Washington, *Anti-Blackness in English religion, 1500-1800*. (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1984), 71.
- ¹²²⁸ Gates, "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, 208.
- ¹²²⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 54-56.
- ¹²³⁰ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 66.
- ¹²³¹ Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition*, 39.
- ¹²³² Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 69.
- ¹²³³ Washington, *Anti-Blackness in English religion, 1500-1800*, 71.
- ¹²³⁴ Davis, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, 75.
- ¹²³⁵ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 2002, 3.
- ¹²³⁶ Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 161.
- ¹²³⁷ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 39-40.
- ¹²³⁸ Edward Berry, "Othello's Alienation," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30, no. 2 (1990): 319-20, doi:10.2307/450520.
- ¹²³⁹ Laurence Shore, "The Enduring Power of Racism: A Reconsideration of Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black*," *History and Theory* 44, no. 2 (May 2005): 326, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2303.2005.00318.x.
- ¹²⁴⁰ Erickson, *Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance*, 10.
- ¹²⁴¹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 1993.
- ¹²⁴² Jordan, *White Over Black*.
- ¹²⁴³ Arthur L. Little, *Shakespeare Jungle-Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice*, Nachdr. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 14)
- ¹²⁴⁴ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 582-583.

¹²⁴⁵ Arthur L. Little, *Shakespeare Jungle-Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice*, Nachdr. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 5.

¹²⁴⁶ Little, *Shakespeare Jungle-Fever*, 5.

¹²⁴⁷ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 78.

¹²⁴⁸ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 17.

¹²⁴⁹ *Othello*, ed. Russ McDonald (Penguin Group US, 2002), 1392.

¹²⁵⁰ Jones, *Othello's Countrymen*, viii; 5;10;11. And Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*, 9.

¹²⁵¹ Jones, *Othello's Countrymen*, viii.

¹²⁵² *Othello*, ed. Russ McDonald (Penguin Group US, 2002), 1394.

¹²⁵³ Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 34.

¹²⁵⁴ Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves*, 37.

¹²⁵⁵ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 54.

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¹²⁵⁷ Barbara Everett, "'Spanish' Othello: The Making of Shakespeare's Moor," in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65–81.

¹²⁵⁸ Vaughan, *Othello*, 1994, 22.

¹²⁵⁹ Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors,'" 362-363.

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¹²⁶¹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2; 24.

¹²⁶² (Skinner 2002)

¹²⁶³ Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 12.

¹²⁶⁴ Benjamin, "Did Shakespeare Intend Othello to Be Black? A Meditation on Blacks and the Bard," 95.

¹²⁶⁵ Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, 108.

¹²⁶⁶ Bernard Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor," in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23.

¹²⁶⁷ Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor," 23-36.

¹²⁶⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Ernst A. J. Honigmann, 2.

¹²⁶⁹ Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor," 23.

¹²⁷⁰ Schmuck, "From Sermon to Play."

¹²⁷¹ Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor," 23-24.

¹²⁷² Phyllis Natalie Braxton, "Othello: The Moor and the Metaphor," *South Atlantic Review* 55, no. 4 (November 1990): 3, doi:10.2307/3200442.

¹²⁷³ Braxton, "Othello: The Moor and the Metaphor," 7.

¹²⁷⁴ Braxton, "Othello: The Moor and the Metaphor," 5.

PART FOUR: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 116. Map depicting Europe in the Renaissance and the new monarchies which arose during the time period. No copyright information available. Extracted from [renaissanceforadults.weebly.com.https://renaissanceforadults.weebly.com/politics.html](https://renaissanceforadults.weebly.com/politics.html), accessed December, 2017.



Figure 117. Workshop of Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Henry VIII*, c.1537-1547. Oil on canvas, 1345 x h2390 cm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.
<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/eAHC0d0WiemXSA>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 118. Detail from Claes Jansz Visscher's *view of London*, England, 1616, showing the Globe Theatre. The Granger Historical Picture Archive All Rights Reserved. <https://www.granger.com/results.asp?image=0013457&screenwidth=1562>, accessed December, 2017.

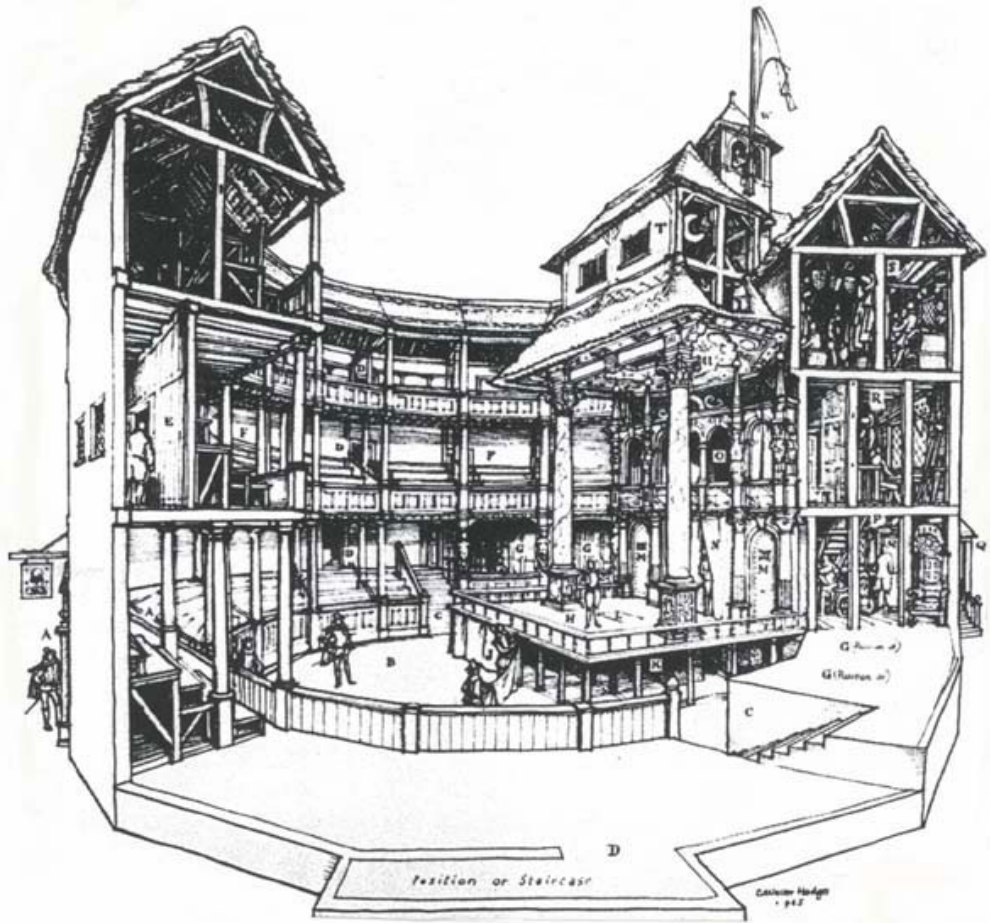


Figure 119. C. Walter Hodges, *A conjectural reconstruction of the Globe Playhouse around 1599-1613, based on archeological and documentary evidence*, 1958. The Folger Shakespeare Library.



Figure 120. Reconstructed Globe, London, n/d. Photograph by Ed O’Keeffe.
<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/f2/6d/23/f26d236f13efba095b085319f37bec9d.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 121. Unidentified artist, *Rei Dom Sebastião de Portugal*, c. 1578. Reproduced by Achetron, The Free Social Encyclopedia. http://www.traditioninaction.org/History/HistImages/C_007_Seb2.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 122. Statue of King Sebastian in the center of Lagos, Algarve, 2006. Photograph by Jill and Ian, Maxted Travels with Modestine. <http://modestine.blogspot.com/2006/02/ends-of-world.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 123. Unknown artist, *Portrait of Anthonius Coninck van Portugal (Pretender to the Throne), Algarve showing the medal of the Order of Aviz, 1595*. Flemish engraving. This is a copy of the original engraving at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

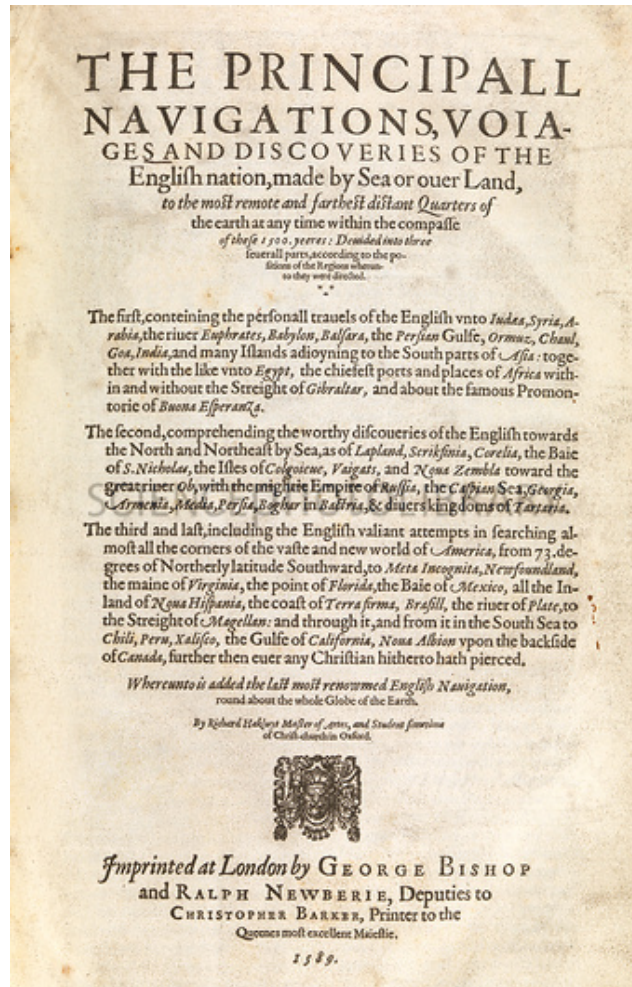


Figure 124. Richard Hakluyt, Title page of “The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English,” published by George Bishop and Ralph Newberie in 1589. “This work contained numerous travel tales and explorer’s stories collected by Hakluyt. The extended title shown here describes them as ‘Made by Sea or Over Land to the Most Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at Any Time within the Compasse of These 1500 Years’. The three parts are described, listing the many places explored. Hakluyt’s credentials are at bottom, with details of the London printers George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, deputies to the Queen’s Printer Christopher Barker.” Jean and Jay I. Kislak Collection, University of Pennsylvania Libraries.



Figure 125. Paul van Somer, *James I/VI (with the unfinished Banqueting House by architect Inigo Jones in the background)*, c. 1620. Oil on canvas, 227 x 149.5 cm. The Royal Collection, London. <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/404446/james-i-and-vi-1566-1625>, accessed December, 2017.

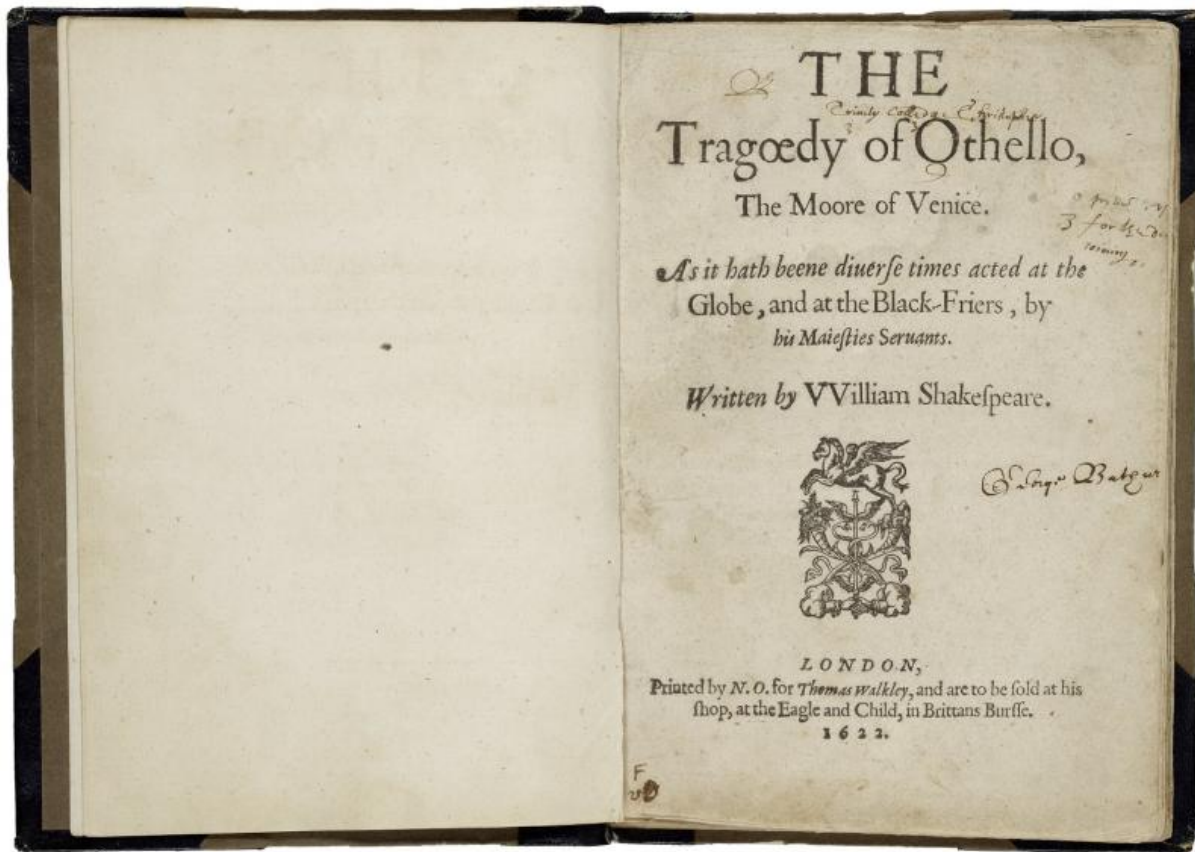


Figure 126. William Shakespeare, *Othello*, *Quarto 1*. London, printed by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Walkley, 1622. Courtesy The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C., US. <http://shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/othello-first-edition>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 127. Claes Janszoon Visscher, *Panorama of London*, 1616. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., US.
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/pga.02965/>, accessed December, 2017.

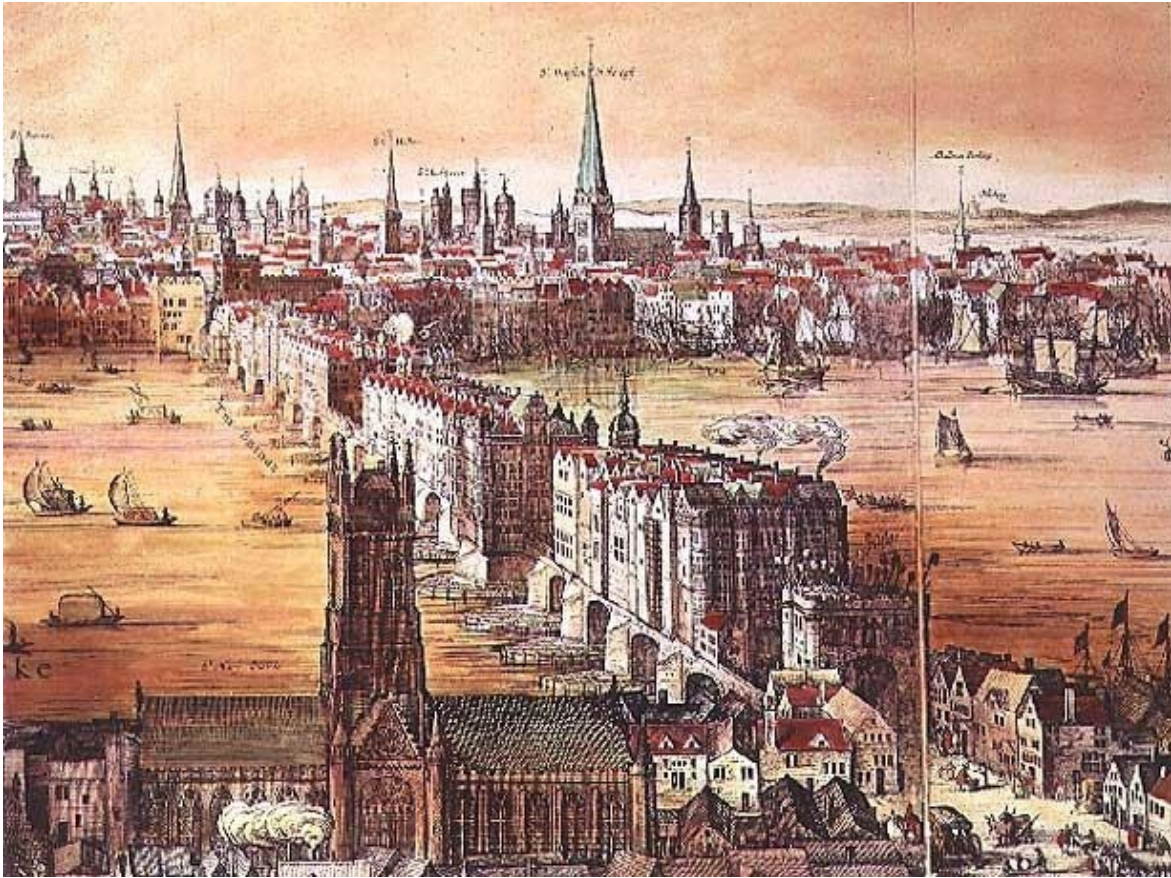


Figure 128. Unknown author, A View of 17th Century London & London Bridge from Southwark. A World Elsewhere Blog. <http://aworldelsewhere-finn.blogspot.com/2011/01/london-city-of-kites-and-crows.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 129. Map depicting Shakespeare's London. Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, *Londinum Feracissimi Angliae Regni Metropolis*, 1579. 300 x 485mm. Sotheby's. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/travel-atlases-maps-natural-history/lot.17.html>, accessed December, 2017.

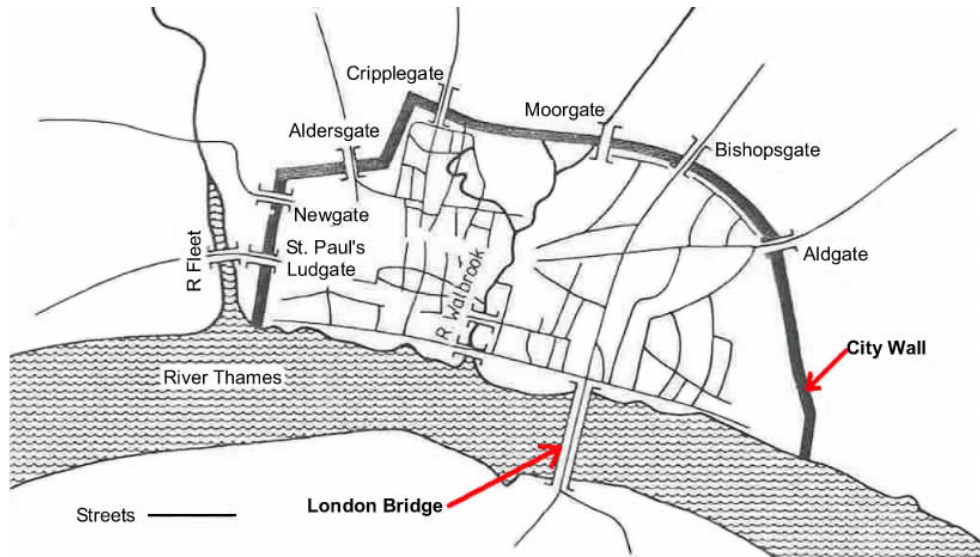


Figure 131. Map depicting Medieval London. “London was once a medieval walled city with just seven city gates before transforming into the urban mass recognisable today as being served by sixteen air ports (Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Stansted and City), all interconnected and served by rail and bus transport links.” Map and text by BLARCHITECTURE.com http://www.blablarchitecture.com/2012/02/127sho_london-gateway-from-medieval-bishopsgate-to-media-evil-shoreditch/, accessed December, 2017.

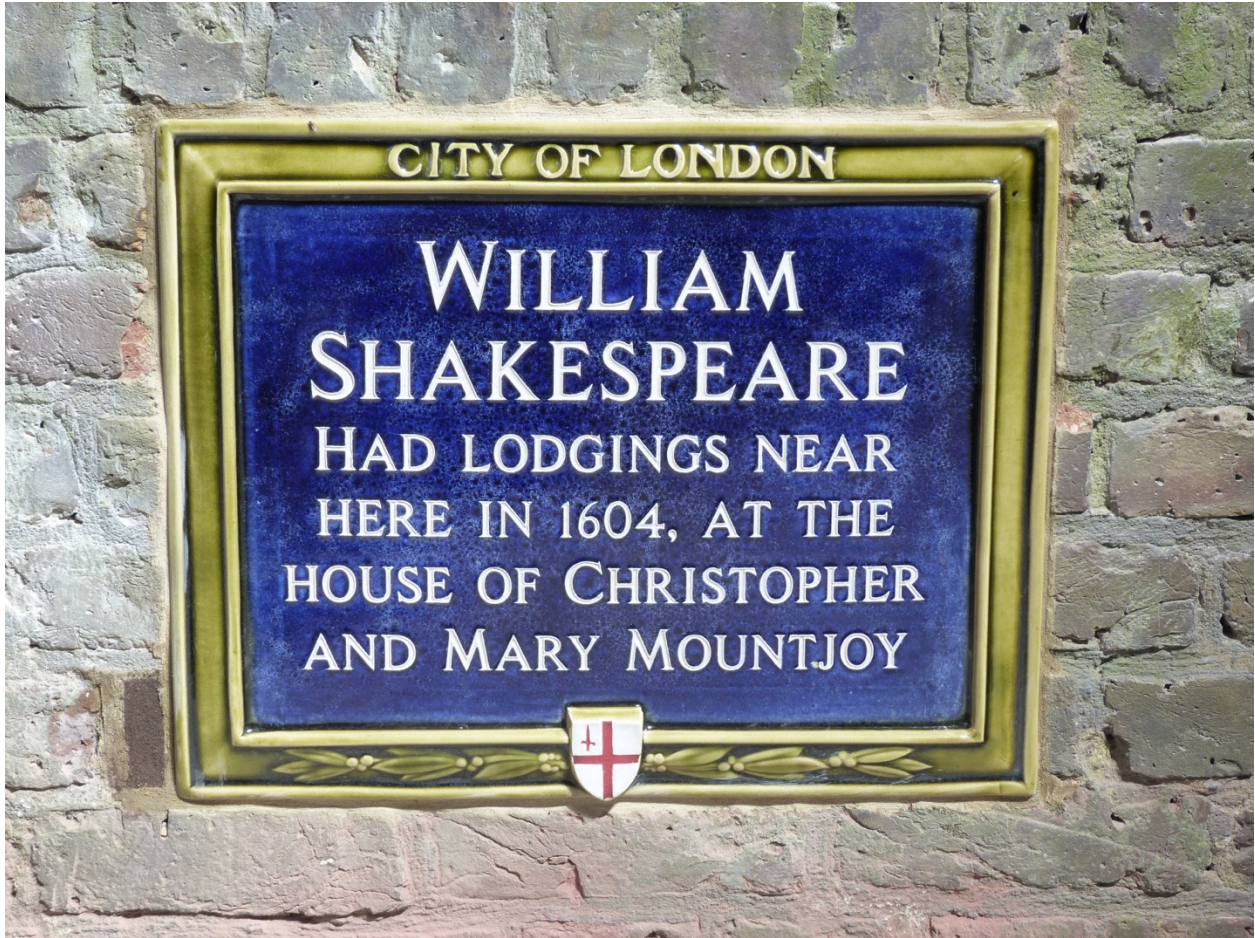


Figure 132. Shakespeare Plaque, EC2, EC2. Noble Street, St Olave's churchyard, Silver Street, City of London, 2016. Text says, "William Shakespeare had lodgings near here in 1604, at the house of Christopher and Mary Mountjoy." Photograph by Bob Jones, Lostcityoflondon.com. <https://lostcityoflondon.co.uk/2016/04/23/william-shakespeare-1564-1616/6-shakespeares-lodgings-silver-street/>, accessed December, 2017.

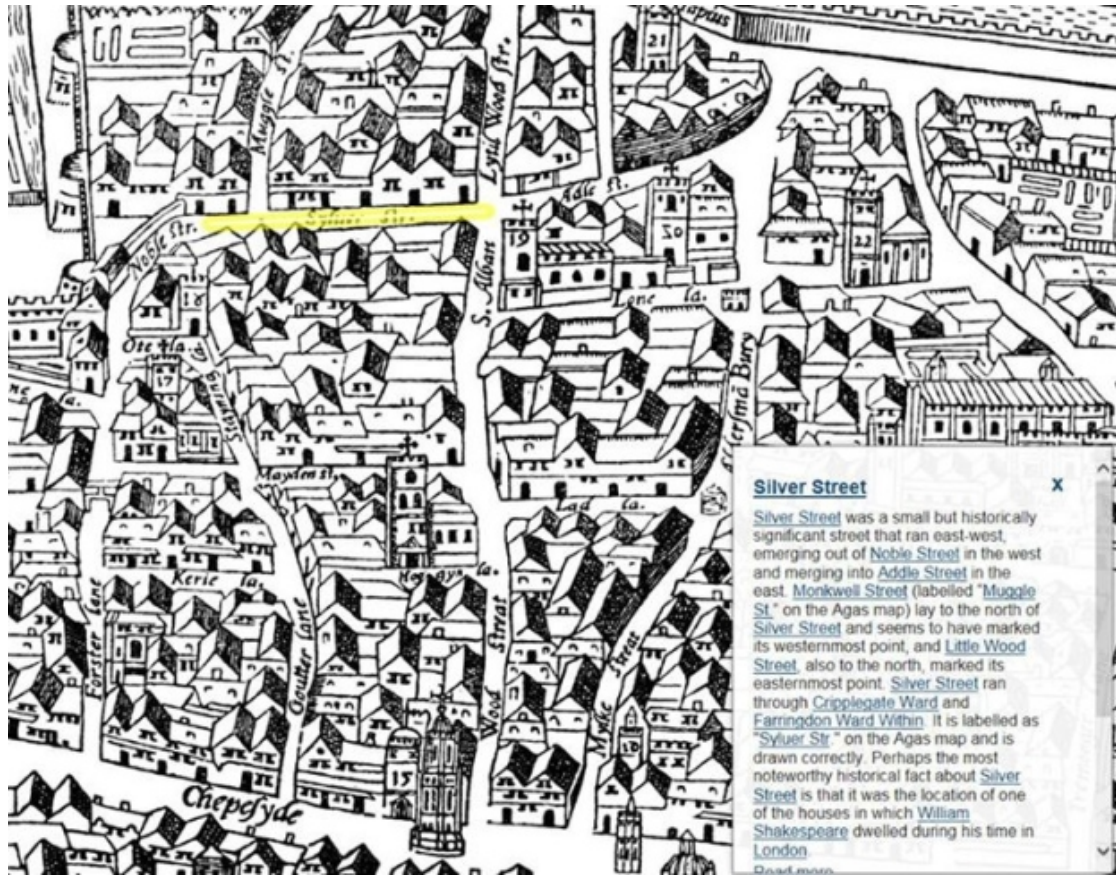


Figure 133. Interactive Map of Early Modern labels streets and landmarks from 17th century London, including Silver Street, where William Shakespeare resided. Map by University of Victoria, Canada. <http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 134. Silver Street, Near St. Giles Church, n/d. Top of Noble Street where it turned to Silver Street, it shows also shows the location with St. Paul's in view. William Shakespeare lodged here for several years after 1604 during the early part of the reign of James I. Photograph by Shalt Project, Shakespearean London Theatres. <http://shalt.dmu.ac.uk/locations/silver-street-near-st-giles-church.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 135. Unknown artist (formerly attributed to George Gower), *Armada Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I*, c. 1588. National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 136. Memorial Bust of Shakespeare in Old Reading Room. The Folger Shakespeare Library. Photograph by Julie Ainsworth.
<https://www.folger.edu/sites/default/files/OldRRbust12.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 137. Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, as viewed from the pedestrian Henley Street, 18 September, 2012. Photograph by David Iliff, CC-BY-SA 3.0. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/Shakespeare%27s_Birthplace%2C_Stratford-upon-Avon_-_Sept_2012.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 138. Unknown artist (possibly Marcus Gheeraerts), *Queen Elizabeth I, Dancing with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester*, c.1580. Courtesy of Penshurst Palace, Kent.



Figure 139. Paul van Somer, *Anne of Denmark*, 1617. Oil on canvas, 265.5 x 209.0 cm. “Anne of Denmark stands facing half to the right, wearing a green riding habit and a tall-crowned hat with red plumes. A black groom wearing scarlet and gold livery holds her horse to the left.” The Royal Collection Trust, London.



Figure 140. Unknown artist, *Portrait of John Hawkins*, 1581. National Maritime Museum, London. <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/displayRepro.cfm?reproID=BHC2755>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hawkins_\(naval_commander\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hawkins_(naval_commander)), accessed December, 2017.



Figure 141. Robert Cook, *The later grant of arms to John Hawkins*, 1571. “With the addition bearing heraldic symbols related to Riohacha, Colombia (then Rio de la Hacha), for his notable victory there, the addition being; on a canton or, an escallop between two palmers staves sable. Note the lion in the grant of arms is describes as passant, but in the accompanying illustration is statant.” Courtesy College of Arms, United Kingdom.



Figure 142. Attributed to Jodocus Hondius, *Sir Francis Drake*, c. 1583. National Portrait Gallery, London. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01934/Sir-Francis-Drake?LinkID=mp01357&role=sit&rNo=3>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 143. The Drake Jewel (or Diadem), 1575-1586. The Drake Jewel given to Sir Francis Drake by Elizabeth I probably in the year 1586. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 144. Detail of figure 143.



Figure 145. Unknown artist, Marriage of St Ursula to Prince Conan, c.1520. Panel of the Santa Auta Altarpiece, from the Monastery of Madre Deus in Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph by Jose Pessoa, 1993. Reproduced by kind permission of Mestre Retabulo de Santa Auta and Direcao-Geral do Patrimonio Cultural/Arquivo de documentacao Fotografica (DGPC/ADF).



Figure 146. Westminster Tournament Roll, 1511. Detail of The Black Trumpeter at Henry VIII's Tournament. "This image, an extract from the 60ft-long Westminster Tournament Roll, shows six trumpeters, one of whom is Black and is almost certainly John Blanke. All the trumpeters are wearing yellow and grey, with blue purses at their waists. John Blanke is the only one wearing a brown turban latticed with yellow. He is mounted on a grey horse with a black harness." Courtesy of The College of Arms, London.
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/docs/john_blanke.htm
accessed December, 2017.



Figure 147. Detail of figure 146, Tournament Roll.



Figure 148. Gray's Inn, London, 2012. Photograph by Liz Dollimore, BloggingShakespeare.com.
<http://bloggingshakespeare.com/where-did-they-perform-the-comedy-of-errors>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 149. William Henri Toms, *The North-West Prospect of the Church of St. Botolph Without Aldgate*, 1739. Engraving. Sulis Fine Art. <https://www.sulisfineart.com/william-henri-toms-1739-engraving-prospect-of-the-church-of-st-botolph.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 150. Burial of Domingo, “A black negro servant unto William Winter,” 27th August 1587, St. Botolph's, Aldgate. Died of consumption, aged 40. Record held at the London Metropolitan Archives. Photograph by historian Miranda Kaufmann, <http://www.mirandakaufmann.com/blog/egyptians-in-early-modern-england>, accessed December, 2017.

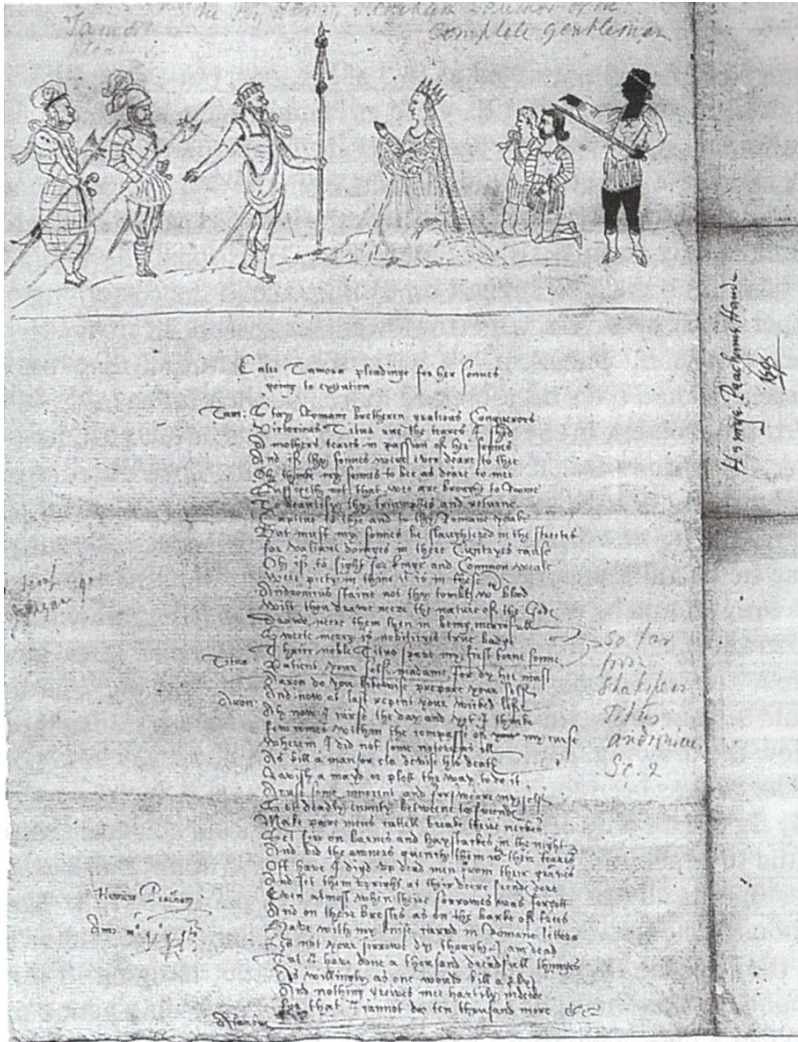


Figure 151. Henry Peacham's illustration of lines from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, c.1595.



Figure 152. Inigo Jones, *Costume Design for Daughter of Niger* for Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*. The masque was performed on 6 January, 1605.

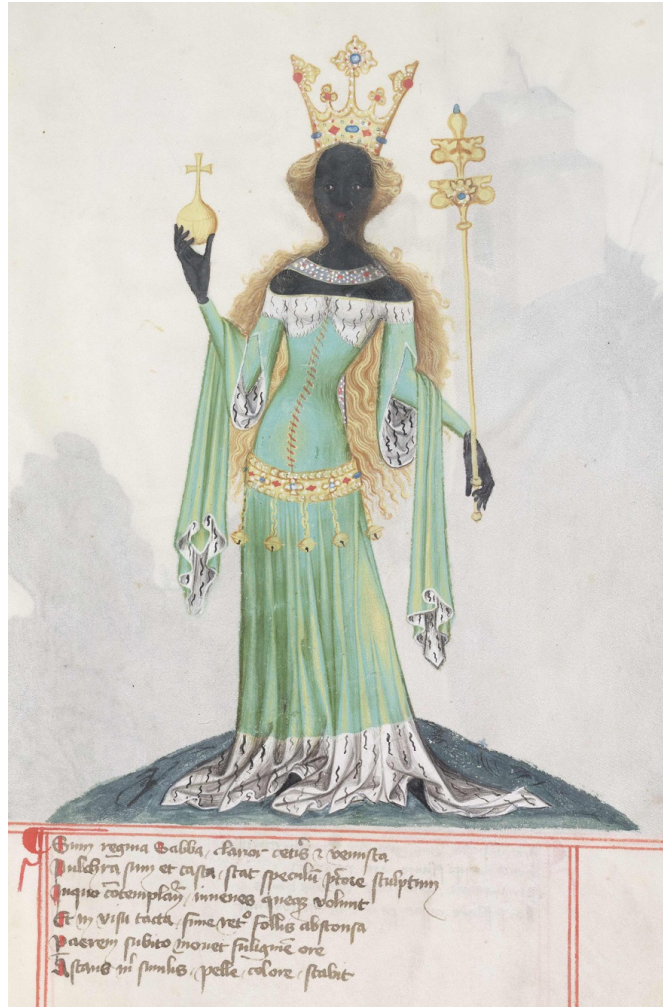


Figure 153. Conrad Kyeser, *De Bellifortis* (The Queen of Sheba), c.1402-05. Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Germany.

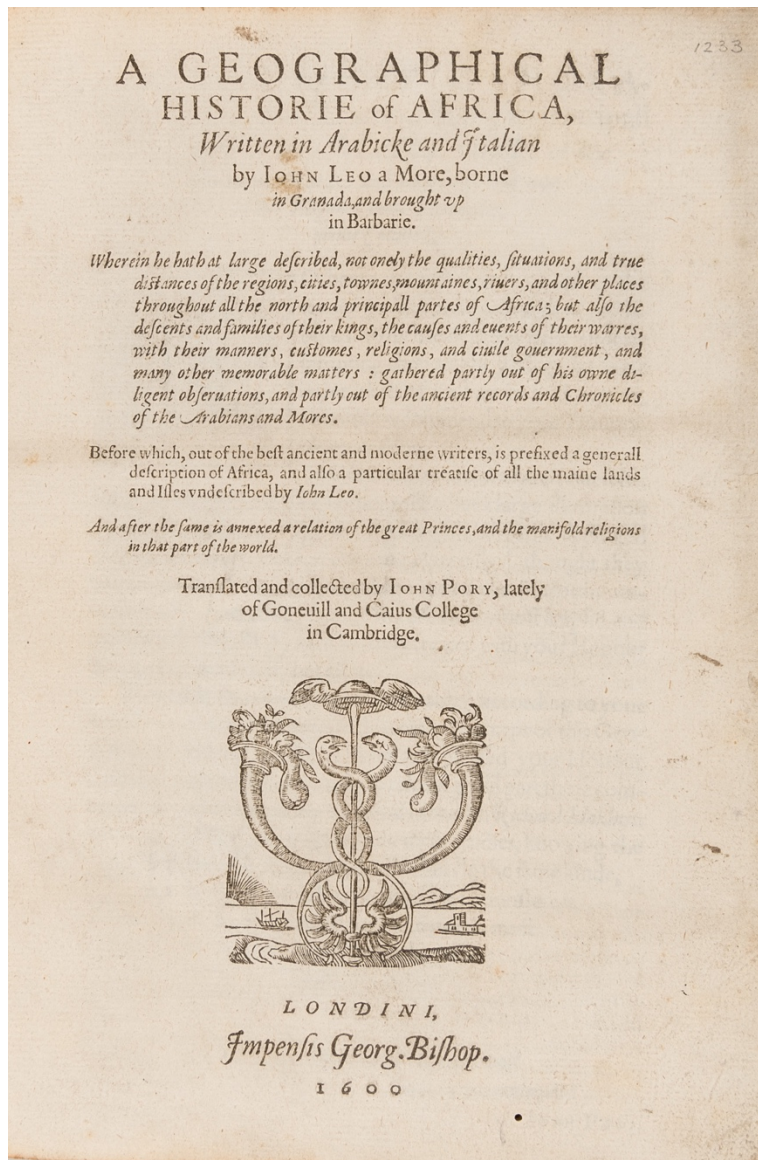


Figure 154. Leo Africanus (1600), “A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by Iohn Leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie. ...” First Edition in English. Folding engraved map. Large 8vo. Nineteenth century calf, rebaked. [8], 420pp. London, [Eliot's Court Press] Imp. Georg. Bishop. Maggs Bros Rare Books. https://www.maggs.com/departments/travel/all_categories/225784/, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 155. Peter Paul Rubens, *Mulay Ahmad*, c. 1609. Oil on panel. Believed to depict Leo Africanus. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/mulay-ahmad-32728>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 156. Unknown artist, *Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth*, c.1600. Oil on oak panel. University of Birmingham, England.

CONCLUSION

The remarkable thing about Shakespeare is that he really is very good, in spite of all the people who say he is very good.

– Robert Graves

Who knew that Ulysses. S. Grant, Commanding General of the Union Army and future president of that Union, was once willing as a junior officer in Texas during the Mexican War to don a dress and play Desdemona in an army camp production?¹²⁷⁵

And who knew the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass (fig. 157) had a 24” x 36” color print (fig. 159) of Othello courting Desdemona hanging in the parlor of his family home (fig. 158)**Error! Reference source not found.?**

Who knew that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson together made a pilgrimage to Shakespeare’s birthplace home, where, according to Adams, on arriving in Stratford (fig. 137) Jefferson fell to his knees and kissed the ground?¹²⁷⁶ The year was 1786.

Who knew that Adams wife Abigail was appalled by seeing race mixing on view in a London performance of *Othello* that same year?

As she wrote to her sister, she found the great English actress Sarah Siddons (fig. 160) who played Desdemona as “interesting beyond any actress I have ever seen” but to see her in the arms of Othello, played by John Kemble (fig. 161) **Error! Reference source not found.**in blackface and “represented blacker than any African,” came as a shock. Mrs. Adams was not sure whether or not her feelings were “the prejudices of education” or from a “natural antipathy” to blacks, but “my whole soul shuddered whenever I saw the sooty heretic Moor touch the fair Desdemona.” She could admit that Othello was “manly, generous,” even

“noble” in character, but she could not get over her aversion to his color. It seemed to amuse her husband, who was her companion at the play that evening, that his wife was so filled with “horror and disgust” every time the “sooty” actor touched Desdemona, even though she knew it was just a performance.

No, Mrs. Adams was not pleased with her racial bias. She made it a point to admonish herself to remember that there is “something estimable” in every human being. The “liberal mind,” she wrote, “regards not what nation or climate it springs up in, not what *color* or *complexion* the man is.” Nonetheless, she confessed to her sister, “I could not separate the African color from the man, nor prevent that disgust and horror which filled my mind every time I saw him touch the gentle Desdemona.”¹²⁷⁷ The experience of reading the play was instrumentally different for her from watching the work performed.

Abigail and John’s son, John Quincy Adams, whose admiration for Shakespeare was “little short of idolatry,” had a similar reaction to *Othello* when he saw it played.¹²⁷⁸ In the same vein of thought as his mother, he simply could not credit that “a young woman so virtuous and Chaste as Desdemona” would, in Shakespeare’s words, “Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom” of a black man. The son could praise certain parts of the play – it was Shakespeare after all, but what he perceived to be incongruities in human nature stopped his pleasure in what he would normally derive from one of the poet’s dramas.¹²⁷⁹

Years after, J.Q.A. wrote a harsh critique of his perceptions of *Othello*’s deficiencies that was published as an article in the *New England Magazine* (1835). There he expanded on his distaste for the play. How can a person sympathize with Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian nobleman, he asks if

she falls in love and makes a runaway match with a blackamoor for no better reason

than that he has told her a braggart story of his hair-breadth escapes in war. For this, she not only violates her duties to her father, her family, her sex, and her country, but she makes the first advance.... The blood must circulate briskly in the veins of a young woman, so fascinated, and so coming to the tale of a rude, unbleached African soldier.”¹²⁸⁰

For John Quincy Adams, the “great moral lesson” of *Othello*, is that “black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage upon the law of Nature.” When seen on stage, he wrote, Desdemona’s “fondling” with Othello “is disgusting.” The way she conducts herself is so repellant, “that when Othello smothers her in bed, the terror and the pity subside immediately into the sentiment that she has her deserts.”

Harsh judgment indeed!

Following his term as president and while a sitting member of the House of Representatives John Quincy Adams was a champion against slavery in America. In 1841, he successfully defended in a controversial case before the Supreme Court the right to freedom for a cohort of rebellious slaves aboard the Cuban ship, *La Amistad*. The same *Amistad* that lent its name and story to the popular 1997 Steven Spielberg film. In the course of the trial the leader of the African captives, Cinque (fig. 162)**Error! Reference source not found.**, a heroic figure, was compared to Othello in the popular press for his noble bearing as an exemplar of his race.¹²⁸¹

Incongruities indeed!

We have no record of Jefferson having seen Othello in London. But one year later, in 1787, Sally Hemings, then aged fourteen and a slave in Jefferson’s household, accompanied his daughter Mary to London and then on to Paris where “the great man” served as the American Ambassador to France. Hemings was the half sister to Jefferson’s deceased wife Martha. They shared a white father, but Hemings mother was a concubine, black and

enslaved. Jefferson obviously did not share the Adams' aversion to interracial sex because he fathered six children, four of whom survived, on the young, defenseless and biracial Sally Hemings.¹²⁸²

To understand the significance of *Othello* when slavery was a deeply ingrained institution of American life (fig. 163)**Error! Reference source not found.**, one only need imagine Abraham Lincoln as a solitary boy, famous for his love of Shakespeare, reading *Othello* by the firelight of his father's frontier log cabin in Southern Indiana – a structure still standing not far from where I grew up. It was there Thomas Lincoln moved his family from the slave state of Kentucky in 1816 to the new Hoosier free state, attracted by the social and political reality that slavery was outlawed. *Othello* offered young Lincoln an astonishingly different perspective of what it meant to be a black man than could be witnessed in America's antebellum borderlands and Southern slave society.¹²⁸³ There to be a black man likely meant being a rural field slave – inexorably linked to servile status, lack of education and the lowest imaginable social class because of his race.

Reading Shakespeare played a constitutive role throughout Abraham Lincoln's life. And Americans are so steeped in Lincoln lore that it surely will not come as a surprise that Lincoln knew the text of *Othello* so well that he used lines from the play to argue (and win) a court case in Illinois (fig. 164, fig. 165) **Error! Reference source not found.****Error! Reference source not found.**¹²⁸⁴ Or that he quoted General Othello in a letter on military matters relating to the Mexican American War (fig. 166)**Error! Reference source not found.** Or that it was in the lines of *Othello* he as president found the immortal words “better angels” that were included in a signature line from his First Inaugural Address: “*The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart*

and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

Lincoln loved going to the theater, and *Othello* was one of his favorite plays

He was eager to see it performed in Washington, and when he did get to see it, one of his secretaries who was with him was struck by “the keen interest with which he followed the development of Iago’s subtle treachery. One would have thought that such a character would have had few points of attraction for a man to whose nature all its peculiar traits were so utterly foreign. Perhaps he was fascinated by the very contrast.” Lincoln insisted on talking to the Iago performer between acts, with “a very near approach to excitement.”¹²⁸⁵

Lincoln had none of the revulsion that John Quincy Adams had for the character of Othello. Later on, when newly formed black regiments distinguished themselves in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, in 1864, the president was enormously pleased. He recalled a story some of his friends in Chicago told him about the reaction of their black servant to a presentation of the play, “with the distinguished actor, Edwin Forrest playing Othello. Asked afterward what he thought of the play, the servant said thoughtfully: ‘Well, layin’ aside all sectional prejudices and any partiality I may have for the race, derned ef I don’t think the nigger held his own with any on ’em.’” Lincoln thought the black soldiers had bravely “held their own” on the battlefield.¹²⁸⁶

Lincoln made the acquaintance of several Shakespearean actors. One of them was Edwin Booth (fig. 167)**Error! Reference source not found.**, brother to the man – a lesser actor – who would take his life.¹²⁸⁷ Who could imagine that actor John Wilkes Booth **Error! Reference source not found.** played (fig. 168) Othello in Boston one year before he shot Abraham Lincoln for freeing the slaves (fig. 169)**Error! Reference source not found.**? And that in 1890 Wilkes’ famous brother Edwin would make the oldest extant recording of Othello’s eloquent speech **Error! Reference source not found.** (fig. 170) before the Venetian senators, professing his love for Desdemona and hers for him. It is a reedy-voiced, thin rendition that can be accessed on YouTube today.

And who knew that over one hundred years after Edwin Booth made his historic recording, that the great James Earl Jones (fig. 171)**Error! Reference source not found.**

would reprise his splendid 1980s' Broadway performance, giving spectacular voice to "Othello's music" by reciting with his customary bass-baritone gravitas and deep emotion that same famous passage Booth left a record of during an evening of poetry at The White House for the newly elected black president and the first family?

Othello's so-called "Senate Speech," is one of the most famous monologues in the history of the theater, is the foundation of this study. Othello, hired in service to the Renaissance Venetian State to defend its interests against the Turks, speaks these mellifluous words when he is summoned before the Duke to justify his elopement with Desdemona.

OTHELLO. *Her father loved me; oft invited me;
Still question'd me the story of my life,
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it;
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field
Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven
It was my hint to speak, — such was the process;
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.*

*This to hear Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intently: I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffer'd. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story.
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used:
Here comes the lady; let her witness it.*

Act 1. Scene 3

James Earl Jones' performance, too, is available on YouTube. I urge you to view it. I had the great pleasure of seeing Jones during his Broadway run of *Othello*, and his is a masterful and definitive performance.

Othello and Obama

Because of the United States' contentious racial past, with its infamy of slavery and segregation, *Othello* – the story of a black man of means and consequence as Shakespearean hero – remains particularly germane to the American experience. The story of Barack Hussein Obama (fig. 172) as the first African American president of the United States is impacted by *Othello* as a prominent feature of the times with Obama's Kenyan father and Kansan mother a latter-day *Othello* and *Desdemona*. Barack Obama's own assessment of his status as a biracial child in America in the sixties in his 1995 memoir *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, is both moving and sobering:

Miscegenation. The word is humpbacked, ugly, portending a monstrous outcome: like *antebellum* or *octoroon*, it evokes images of another era, a distant world of horsewhips and flames, dead magnolias and crumbling porticos. And yet it wasn't until 1967 – three years after Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize, a time when America had already begun to weary of black demands for equality, the problem of discrimination presumably solved – that the Supreme Court of the US would get around to telling the state of Virginia that its ban on interracial marriages violated the Constitution. In 1960, the year my parents were married, *miscegenation* was still described as a felony in over half the states in the Union. In many parts of the South, my father would have been strung up from a tree for merely looking at my mother the wrong way; in the most sophisticated of northern cities, the hostile stares, the whispers, might have driven a woman in my mother's predicament into a back-alley abortion – or at the very least to a distant convent that could arrange for adoption. Their very image together would have been considered lurid and perverse, a handy retort to the handful of softheaded liberals who supported a civil rights agenda.

That we have grown inured to how unlikely it really was that *Othello* should exist at

all as the protagonist of an English Renaissance tragedy has caused us to lose sight of the radical statement Shakespeare was making about race, gender and class in his unusual play. The tension of interracial encounter, a dominant theme of the early modern Atlantic world, with fear of miscegenation at its core, found Shakespeare responding to this cataclysmic change.

Across world, across the nation, but particularly in the slave owning territories of America, as a free black man with status and authority, Othello served as a challenge to racist thought that classified black people as chattel fit only for bondage. To counteract this, when the play was performed in the Antebellum South, it would be presented as a cautionary tale of the dangers of race mixing.

And if you think backlash against black/white “miscegenation” (for another controversy see fig. 173) **Error! Reference source not found.** is a thing of the past, consider the controversy over a nationally run breakfast cereal commercial in 2013. As *The Huffington Post* reported, “An adorable Cheerios commercial featuring a black/white interracial couple and their daughter generated such a strong racist backlash on YouTube that the comments section had to be closed.” Vitriolic remarks from YouTube viewers that prompted the closure included “references to Nazis, ‘troglodytes’ and ‘racial genocide.’” Cheerios, to its credit, “was unfazed by the racist Internet backlash.” When asked to comment by *Gawker*, Camille Gibson, Cheerios vice president of marketing had this to say: “Consumers have responded positively to our new Cheerios ad. At Cheerios, we know there are many kinds of families and we celebrate them all.” Yet the headline *Gawker* chose to run with their piece tells a different story: “Cheerios Ad Starring Interracial Family Predictably Summons Bigot Wave” – is telling about the current state of racial attitudes. Things have not progressed as much as many

would like to believe. And it is anonymous Internet sites like YouTube's notorious comments section that reveal the still festering hatred towards blacks in American culture and the fear of "race-mixing."¹²⁸⁸

Cheerios' controversial take on the modern family as interracial was given a second act during the 2014 Super bowl broadcast where, as a cultural phenomenon, commercials receive almost as much attention as the game. Featuring the same winning cast as in the original: black father, white mother and adorable biracial daughter, "Grace." It was a bold move, marking the brand's inaugural foray into the most competitive arena of advertising in the world. General Mills, the parent company behind Cheerios, sent any detractors a strong message. Mindful that their cereal is a "wholesome, all-American, classic brand," and that showing people in "a multiracial family in a Cheerios ad" could indeed "make a difference," General Mills set out to make that culturally positive difference through their branding choice.

Reporter Stuart Elliott observed in *The New York Times*, "When the original commercial received a hate-filled reaction, some attributed it to a debate about the spot on the front page of *Reddit*, the popular social-news website. Some said they believed that critics of President Obama — the child of a black father and a white mother — used the commercial as a proxy to attack him."¹²⁸⁹

As cultural critic Ta-Nehisi Coates observes in his incisive 2013 article in *The Atlantic*, "Fear of a Black President," Barack Obama's "acceptance depends not just on being twice as good but on being half as black."¹²⁹⁰ An observation that speaks both to the political and cultural realities of race and Obama's biracial heritage. Barack Obama, like Othello, knows what it is to walk the narrow path of Du Boisian *double-consciousness*: to navigate between the worlds of black and white, especially when power is at stake. And Obama has to

find “a language that speaks to a critical mass in both communities.”¹²⁹¹

Barack Obama certainly knows what it means to have your legitimacy challenged as “Other.”

The politically oppositional phenomenon to President Obama that came to be known as “birtherism” derives from some preternatural fear that Barack Obama is not what he appears to be. Absurdly, he is deemed suspect as some leftist Manchurian candidate – a foreign infiltrator among us – out to destroy America. During his presidency, Obama was plagued by constant efforts on the part of the radical right to deny his legitimacy. Those who claimed Obama is a Kenyan national by birth make him an agent for anti-colonialism seeking retribution for his native Africa. His Christian faith is dismissed as a mere charade as Obama’s Muslim heritage is held to be what truly defines him. The commonly articulated fear was that this former Constitutional law professor was seeking to impose Sharia law in place of the Constitution he swore to uphold on the Bible to uphold as president.

Racism was the motivation at the core of all this. Signs carried at Tea Party rallies were rife with racist anti-Obama language. And to America’s further shame, Tea Party protestors waved confederate flags outside the White House gate to protest what ironically was the Republican shutdown of government in the fall of 2013. In Michigan, one Republican member of a local council even attended “a protest carrying an image of Mr. Obama’s decapitated head on a pike.”

No other president has had to endure such an assault on not only his political prestige but his right to hold office. President Obama’s determination to stay above the fray and appear indifferent to these base attacks, rather than cool the ardor of his extreme opponents,

made them all the more fanatical in their opposition and hate speech.¹²⁹² Obama the ape, the mongrel, the beast. Just like Othello.

As historian Steven Hahn noted at the time, “The ‘birther’ challenge,” which galvanized the hard core Republican base, “expresses a deep unease with black claims to political inclusion and leadership.” This is an unease that “can be traced as far back as the 1860s.” A time when white Southerners and many white Northerners questioned “the legitimacy of black male suffrage.” Ultimately, white outrage and anxiety led to the short-lived success of black representation in the seats of local, state and national leadership as duly elected office holders. The attenuated success of Reconstruction and ensuing Jim Crow laws sent the clear message that “black people did not belong in American political society and had no business wielding power over white people.”¹²⁹³ Such is Iago’s complaint, we may recall, when Othello passes him over for promotion.

A Latter-Day Iago

That Donald Trump, the flamboyant New York real estate developer and reality show celebrity, chose to be the leading national spokesperson for birtherism struck me at the time as just bizarre. I lived in New York through the 1980s, so I witnessed first-hand Trump’s outrageous shenanigans as a media whore. But this was so different. I believe that Barack Obama triggered in Donald Trump some profound anxiety based on the kind of envy that motivates Iago’s irrational hatred of Othello. An anxiety that can be distilled into the simplest racist adage: The white man is deserving the black man is not.

If you are white, male and rich, so it would follow, no black man is entitled to anything that you, the white man, have not gained for yourself. If the black man acquires what

you the incipiently more powerful white man does not have, you can, if you so choose, destroy the black man's legitimacy to acquire that privilege and/or take away his rights – whether it is to a woman (Desdemona) or prestige (Obama's presidency or Othello's Venetian command) – simply because your status in the hierarchy of the culture dictates your entitlement to do so (fig. 174). I see Trump's attack on Obama as the festering of existential jealousy and spite. Such was the force of his superior power through his white male privilege that his engagement with birtherism gave it a validity it would never have had otherwise. And that alone is the salient fact Trump seemed to relish.

Just like the inciting event of Othello's passing over Iago's for promotion and favoring Cassio, what set Trump off and put him over the edge, it would appear, was President Obama's public humiliation of The Donald at the 2011 White House Correspondent's dinner.

As Amy Wang wrote in the *Washington Post*, February 27, 2017:

If some media and political pundits are to be believed, President Trump sits in the White House today as the result of several hours one warm April evening nearly six years ago: the 2011 White House correspondents' dinner.

That year, at the invitation of none other than The Washington Post, Trump — then best known for "Celebrity Apprentice" — attended the event, an annual gathering of journalists that typically has been headlined by the sitting president. But Trump announced over the weekend that he won't attend this year's version of the dinner.

Trump was no ordinary celebrity guest in 2011, however. In addition to being a reality TV fixture, he was one of the most vocal opponents of President Obama, leading the "birther" movement that had demanded Obama release his birth certificate. Trump had also been hinting, not for the first time, that he might launch his own bid for the presidency.

All of those things coalesced to make Trump the target of a large swath of jokes at the 2011 version of the dinner

"All kidding aside, obviously, we all know about your credentials and breadth of experience," he said. "For example, no, seriously, just recently in an episode of

‘Celebrity Apprentice,’ at the steakhouse, the men’s cooking team did not impress the judges from Omaha Steaks. And there was a lot of blame to go around, but you, Mr. Trump, recognized that the real problem was a lack of leadership and so, ultimately, you didn’t blame Little John or Meatloaf — you fired Gary Busey. And these are the kinds of decisions that would keep me up at night. Well-handled, sir. Well-handled.”

“No one is happier, no one is prouder to put this birth certificate matter to rest than the Donald,” Obama said. “That’s because he can finally get back to focusing on the issues that matter, like: Did we fake the moon landing? What really happened in Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?”

The National Review, in a similar search for what might have motivated Trump to run, published a piece in July titled “How the White House Correspondents’ Dinner Gave Us the Trump Campaign.” The New Yorker’s Adam Gopnik wrote in September 2015 that he had been seated a few tables away from Trump in 2011.

“On that night, Trump’s own sense of public humiliation became so overwhelming that he decided, perhaps at first unconsciously, that he would, somehow, get his own back — perhaps even pursue the presidency after all, no matter how nihilistically or absurdly, and redeem himself,” Gopnik wrote.¹²⁹⁴

Shakespeare: Master of the Public Word

For twenty-plus years he has been on the chopping block of political correctness. His plays have regularly been dropped from the English curriculum on both sides of the Atlantic. And there are genuine arguments for this. But recently Shakespeare has made a comeback in the U.K. Out of fear that students in the United Kingdom are failing “to keep pace academically with children in the world’s top-performing countries,” “Shakespeare will be placed at the heart of a rigorous new National Curriculum,” reported *The Daily Telegraph*, July 8, 2013. The desired effect of this return to Shakespeare is that studying the full text of “at least two” of his plays will help “drive up education standards.” For now, the institutionalization of Shakespeare will go on as a paean to The Bard’s perceived value and influence.¹²⁹⁵

A follow-up announcement came on May 28, 2014. Under the leadership of the Minister of education, Michael Gove, Great Britain's Conservative government has reimagined the English literature exam syllabus with what are being perceived as distinctly political implications. Changes made to the minimum requirements for students taking the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) English exam, usually given when they are 15 or 16 constitute removing the category of "prose from different cultures" and replacing it with "modern works from Britain." The cuts are mostly from the American literature canon where, for example, Maya Angelou's coming of age memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was on the chopping block near to the very day its author died. Other American casualties include Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The new syllabus will be in effect next year in time for the 2017 exam cycle. Shakespeare is "in," but *Othello* is not among the approved selections (now only one being required), which include *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest*. No issues with the relevancy of the Dead White Male poet syndrome in contemporary Britain's jingoistic, Anglo-centric world.¹²⁹⁶

Of course, the right way to contend with the competition between Shakespeare and other valued texts is simply not to consign Shakespeare to solely a textual study. Courses in theater and drama as an arts practice should be part of every young person's education, along with the other arts. If the arts were valued as part of the standard curriculum then teachers and students would not be faced with such draconian choices. In Shakespeare's day he was called a "scenic poet;" his plays should be studied *en scène*.

Othello is one of the most enduring popular and accessible plays in the canon. New

productions of *Othello* are planned or opened in professional, educational and community venues with reliable regularity (such as fig. 176, fig. 177)**Error! Reference source not found.** And every few years a new film of *Othello* comes out of Hollywood (such as fig. 178, fig. 179)**Error! Reference source not found.** Convened by Shakespeare, multicultural audiences sit together in theaters, cinemas and classrooms and take in, the struggle of a black hero in a hopelessly racialized world. It is a rare circumstance in contemporary society when an interracial audience assembles around the matter of race.

Othello we have a Renaissance text that gives us a means to talk about one of the problematic issues of our modern world. Race is the topic we are often reluctant to seriously broach in productive dialogue. This is a problem because race is a lightning rod for all the divisions that rend American life.

Othello as a Part of Life

Shakespeare is so embedded in American culture we claim him as our own. “The Tragic Genius of Shakespeare: An Ode” by Peter Markoe, penned as early in the new republic as 1787, pronounces that, as the world’s “noblest stage,” America is the only appropriate showground to do justice to Shakespeare’s “bold spirit.”¹²⁹⁷

In a witty little article published in the *Huffington Post* (04/09/2014), “10 Things You Didn’t Know About Shakespeare,” Jude Morgan (author of the biographical novel, *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare*), tells us nearly half way through the list just how ubiquitous Shakespeare’s influence over the English language indeed is:

4. You speak Shakespeare. In spite of his reputation among literature-averse students for flowery language, Shakespeare directly created a great deal of the English we use

today. Not only is he recorded as the first user of more words than any other writer, he also made words up: we owe him eyeball, bloodstained, radiance, assassination and lackluster, to name but a few. And his phrases are so embedded in the language, chances are you've used some of them in the last week or so: if for example you've been in a pickle, seen better days, or caught a cold, or been a laughing stock, or had to break the ice, or said good riddance...¹²⁹⁸

Who better to address Shakespeare's influence on other writers than Michiko

Kakutani, longtime respected book critic of *The New York Times*? She reminds us that "Jane Austen once remarked of Shakespeare, 'one gets acquainted' with him 'without knowing how.'" Kakutani goes on to suggest in a 1999 *Times* essay, "All the World's a Stage, Ruled by Guess Who; Why Shakespeare Resonates With the Modern Age," that Shakespeare's "influence on other writers has been so pervasive that he has become part of the very literary air we breathe."

Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Baudelaire, Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello – to name just a few of the authors and thinkers indelibly shaped by Shakespeare is to rattle off a litany of the makers of modern Western culture. Nineteenth-century nihilism and 20th-century psychology, French existentialism and Emersonian self-reliance - all could be said to have seeds in Shakespeare's art.

The fact that such crucial writers and philosophers responded so ardently to Shakespeare, however, suggests that there was something in the playwright's work itself that was in tune with the modern Zeitgeist.¹²⁹⁹

Not content with letting Shakespeare's influence take its course over time, the Hogarth Press website (Vintage Books UK) tells us that this venerable publisher has commissioned The Hogarth Shakespeare "a dedicated series of stand-alone retellings that will form a covetable library as well as a celebration of Shakespeare for years to come. The "unique series" will "delight existing Shakespeare lovers and bring the world's favourite writer to a new readership, young and old."

The novels will be published in print, digital and audio mediums. All formats will be made accessible concurrently across all markets of the Anglophone world. The project – set to launch in 2016 to coincide with the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death – is a radical new idea from a time-honored institution. And true to its founder's standards – author Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard Woolf, who published many literary finds, including T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* in 1922 – only venerated writers are being asked to take up the challenge of turning Shakespeare's plays into prose narratives, "These new versions will be true to the spirit of the original dramas and their popular appeal, while giving authors an exciting opportunity to reinvent these seminal works of English literature."

William Shakespeare's *Othello* retold by Tracy Chevalier, *New York Times*-bestselling author of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* *New Boy* was published in May 2017. As the Hogarth Press website states:

The tragedy of *Othello* is transposed to a 1970s suburban Washington schoolyard, where kids fall in and out of love with each other before lunchtime, and practice a casual racism picked up from their parents and teachers. Peeking over the shoulders of four 11 year olds – Osei, Dee, Ian, and his reluctant 'girlfriend' Mimi – Tracy Chevalier's powerful drama of friends torn apart by jealousy, bullying and betrayal will leave you reeling.¹³⁰⁰

This is not the first time Shakespeare's plays have been rendered in prose. In the nineteenth century, Charles and Mary Lamb produced their classic *Tales from Shakespeare*. The Lamb's versions were designed to make the works manageable for children (I had my copy) who could appreciate the stories but would find difficulty with the language. They did not alter the events of the dramas they merely synopsisized the texts.¹³⁰¹

Another kind of help is available for today's reader of all ages who struggles with Shakespeare's heightened language.

WordPlay Shakespeare project attempts to harness students' aptitude and affection for new technologies by allowing them to watch or listen to sections of Shakespeare's works on digital devices as they view text; new format is part of emerging trend that is seen as way for today's youth to grasp complexity of Shakespeare's language, in mutually reinforcing experience.

Read all about it in *The New York Times*: "Is This a Video I See in Front of Me?" iPad Programs Help Students With Shakespeare, by Charles Isherwood, December 26, 2013.¹³⁰²

And for the digitally inclined who want to see authorship at play, we have Shakespeare performance for the computer age. For this see Claudia La Rocco's review in *The New York Times*: "To Thine Own Algorithm Be True Annie Dorsen's 'A Piece of Work' at BAM," December 15, 2013 is an indication that Shakespeare remains a touchstone of the contemporary.

Theater director and writer Annie Dorsen is debuting [the]third act of her latest play, *A Piece of Work*, at Brooklyn Academy of Music; piece, an algorithmic take on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, features text of original play scrambled into computer codes and chatbots, with performers speaking the computer's choices to the audience.¹³⁰³

As with all of Shakespeare's canonical heroes, we do not think about Othello as anything other than as a part of life. "Othello," is programmed into the original *spell checker* settings of my Microsoft Word processor. As I type this text my Raymond Weill watch – style "Othello" – encircles my left wrist.¹³⁰⁴ In early America even the humblest home would possess a *King James Bible* and along with it – very likely – a version of *The Plays of William the Shakespeare* – "the two great books that form the foundation of American culture."¹³⁰⁵ According to historian and Shakespeare scholar Lawrence Levine, the American people "were able to fit Shakespeare into their culture so easily because he *seemed* to fit it— because so many of his values and tastes were, or at least appeared to be, close to their own."¹³⁰⁶

Othello is a factor influencing the poetics of association and memory. In our age, exposure to *Othello* comes not just from participating in or seeing a production of the play or reading the text (see for example products such as fig. 179, fig. 180, fig. 181). Perhaps it is in the board game “Othello”**Error! Reference source not found.** or the movie adaptation “O” that constitutes a twenty-first century experience with Shakespeare’s Moor. As is “Omkara,” a version in Hindi set in Uttar Pradesh co-written and directed by Vishal Bhardwaj.

As an early plot point in John Gastins’ screenplay for Paramount’s Pictures’ 2013 Oscar-nominated (both writing and acting), movie *Flight*, Shakespeare’s *Othello* is featured as the inspiration behind the porn film the white female lead character Nicole Maggin, a junkie (played by Kelly Reilly), is solicited by her drug dealer to star in. Nicole – a desperate, but not that desperate, massage therapist – knows she has hit rock bottom when the option to play Desdemona as part of a non-Shakespearean threesome, in bed with an actor cast as a very black Othello and Desdemona’s “nurse,” is the offered means to her dope. As low as she is, Kelly refuses to “do anal” for \$2000, an hour, even if her co-star in “The Beast with Two Backs” – a.k.a. “Hole-thello” is presented as desirable because he is a “college kid” with an impressive “pipe.” It is a gross and disgusting scene – and clearly meant to be so. The presence of this micro-drama in *Flight* is made ironic by the knowledge that Denzel Washington, the actor who received a best actor nomination for his role as the airline captain Whip Whitaker, was rumored at the time of the movie’s release to be in discussions to play Othello on Broadway to Al Pacino’s Iago.

Consider this. In the 1965, at the height of the American Civil Rights movement, allusions to *Othello* provided the shocking and disturbing (now offensive in an unintended way) “blue movie” titillation behind the debut of English author’s John Fowles’ vexing,

elusive, intriguing, yet, admittedly erudite psychological thriller - the once perhaps captivating but now somewhat pretentious novel – *The Magus*. As the Fowles protagonist is forced to watch the white female object of his desire have sex with a black man, it is Shakespeare who is shaping this modern scene with meaning as Fowles character sees not a contemporary woman cheating on her supposed lover with her chosen partner, but Desdemona and Othello.

Her stare fixed me. Without rancour and without regret; without triumph and without evil; as Desdemona once looked back on Venice. On the incomprehension, the baffled rage of Venice. I had taken myself to be in some way the traitor Iago punished, in an unwritten sixth act. Chained in hell. But I was also Venice; the state left behind; the thing journeyed from.

— John Fowles, *The Magus*

Within this intertextual experiment of a modern work of literature responding to an epic tradition no other interracial couple than Othello and Desdemona could charge that conversation with such potent meaning and shock value. Only Othello and Desdemona could convey all these conversations throughout the history of literature at once. This the understanding of literature built on the writings of French post-modern theorists like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, for whom the meaning that resides in the modern work is not truly conveyed through the text itself but is evoked by the reader's relationship to the complex of texts that impact the reader's awareness as he or she engages with (in this example) Fowles' novel.¹³⁰⁷

The 2013 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for drama is a Pakistani-American Ayad Akhtar, his prize-winning play, *Disgraced*. In another intertextual "meditation." *Othello* provides the

foundation – “a metaphorical riff” - for the story of the protagonist - an ethnic outsider in the milieu of New York intellectual high-society, a plagued by a “deep-seated self-loathing.”¹³⁰⁸

This post-modern intertextuality is not so new as a practice – (and clearly it is present in films as well as in literature). It is a device Shakespeare himself was a famous for. Whether you call the poet a borrower or appropriator to cushion the reality – thief is just as good a term because Shakespeare acquired many of his plots from other dramatists and chroniclers (Holinshed). *Othello* itself is in a direct intertextual conversation if you will with the Italian writer Cinthio’s “Un Capitano Moro” (“A Moorish Captain”) from his *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565). Indeed, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, the 1623 published collection of the plays – the *First Folio* – is a compendium of original works based on a mosaic of texts that provided Shakespeare with rich source material. The *Hecatommithi* is an extremely large collection. Cinthio identified his stories in a table of contents that offers brief plot summaries of the various tales. Cinthio identifies the source of *Othello* in this listing as “Un Capitano Moro.”¹³⁰⁹ As Stephen Greenblatt notes: “As a writer he rarely started with a blank slate; he characteristically took materials that had already been in circulation and infused them with his supreme creative energies.”¹³¹⁰ Some, like Toni Morrison, would call him a magpie for his sampling habits.

Shakespeare’s output as a dramatist became a cultural commodity for export when a playscript of *Hamlet* was brought aboard a trading ship bound for West Africa in 1607. In the example of the shipboard *Hamlet* off the Guinea Coast, we have evidence of the international dissemination of what has become one of the world’s most identifiable intellectual brands.¹³¹¹ Within the Shakespeare uber-brand *Othello* has been its own brand for hundreds of years. from the slave ship “*Othello*” that sailed up the Rappahannock River and docked in

Fredericksburg to sell slaves in 1771 to the bed sheets sold over the Internet by both J.C. Penney and Neiman Marcus, not so long ago. His presence as a commodity of consumption is ubiquitous; triggering a connection to race that is pervasive and sometimes offensive: (do you really want your comforter named for a man who smothers his wife in her bed?).

He only served ten days as Trump's communications director but in that short time Anthony Scaramucci was able to compare Reince Priebus to Iago in a tweet when he advised Priebus' twitter avatar to: "Read Shakespeare. Particularly Othello."¹³¹²

The history of *Othello* onstage represents and tracks the shifting attitudes towards race and the status of blacks in the culture. It is a reflection of the degrees of racism present in society at any given time. It is a metric of the tensions between the paradox of democracy and white hegemony that define our history.

To understand Othello is to understand the origins of intercultural encounter between Europe and West Africa in the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade – as early as the fifteenth century. To understand Othello is to determine how European notions of racial prejudice evolved first on the Iberian Peninsula, in Moorish Spain and Portugal. To understand Othello is to examine evidence of how European racial attitudes were expressed and depicted in English and European travel writings, scientific and cosmographical treatises during the Age of Expansion. How African and African descended people were represented in literary, visual and popular culture. To analyze how these ideas, beliefs, feelings, stances, and mindsets influenced English and, consequently, Anglo-American identity formation and resulting Eurocentric projections of racial profiling onto black Africans and people of African descent ever since, is to understand Othello.

March 18, 2014 President Barack Obama righted a wrong. Recognizing that a number of soldiers were overlooked for their heroism to the nation because of prejudice or discrimination, many years after the fact the Commander in Chief conferred the Medal of Honor on two dozen soldiers – among them Hispanic, African American and Jewish veterans – who were too long denied their just do.

In his remarks, President Obama had this to say at the Presentation Ceremony at the White House for the Medal of Honor conferees:

No nation is perfect, but here in America we confront our imperfections and face a sometimes painful past – including the truth that some of these soldiers fought, and died, for a country that did not always see them as equal. So with each generation we keep on striving to live up to our ideals of freedom and equality, and to recognize the dignity and patriotism of every person, no matter who they are, what they look like, or how they pray.¹³¹³

Particularly in the slave owning territories of America's past, as a free black man with status and authority, Othello served as a challenge to racist thought that classified black people as chattel fit only for bondage. To counteract this, when the play was performed in the Antebellum South, it would be presented as a cautionary tale of the dangers of race mixing.

Context

The writing of Othello's biography is an opportunity to showcase West African history and culture of the early modern era, the first one hundred and fifty years of European incursion when Portugal held a monopoly on the trade in gold and slaves. This study provides a perspective on a history that is not commonly considered. One aspect is the prospect to use Othello's story to illustrate the personal progress of a West African slave for sale in Portugal and bondage in Portugal and Spain. And as Donald W. Meinig observes:

What needs to be emphasized and clarified is that the Portuguese provided more than a mere seafaring link between Africa and America: they created the systems and societies that made possible and set the pattern for the creation of an Afro-American world. Before Columbus happened upon the American Indies a model for their colonization and exploitation was taking shape in the Luso-African tropics.¹³¹⁴

In 1444, Prince Henry the Navigator introduced one of the most barbaric customs of the slave trade, the slave auction, to Portugal. On August 8, the southern port city of Lagos received a shipment of 235 captives from the Upper Guinea Coast. From the *Chronicle of Guinea*, we have author Zurara's eyewitness account of this ghastly event.¹³¹⁵ According to the royal chronicler, early in the morning, in an effort to avoid the oppressive heat, the Portuguese seaman ferried the enslaved Africans to shore where they were commandeered all together in a nearby field to be apportioned and sold. There Prince Henry, "mounted upon a powerful steed, and accompanied by his retinue," prepared for "distribution of his favours" from his customary fifth.¹³¹⁶ This scene of horror that Zurara describes could easily have been Othello's experience when he first stepped of a slave ship onto Portuguese soil.

A critical component of any slave market was the "interview" that took place between the slave and his or her potential owner that sealed the sale.¹³¹⁷ What was spoken between slave and master that sealed young Othello's fate? Was he to become part of an elite corps of African soldiers who defended Granada during the siege that ended Muslim rule in Spain in 1492. Was he among the spoils of war sent by the victorious Ferdinand and Isabella to the Holy See as a gift to the Pope **Error! Reference source not found.** to mark their Christian triumph?

Taking into account that Shakespeare gives Othello royal African origins, makes him the victim of slavery, cites his call to Jesus (Othello is unusually for not having taken a Christian baptismal name),¹³¹⁸ and places him all over the Mediterranean world as a

mercenary who fought his way out of slavery only to land as General of the Venetian forces, the story of Othello distinctively intersects disparate landscapes. Interpreting Othello's progress through this world – such as at the slave market in Lagos – provides useful, even innovative historical insight that expands our vision of the past that rivals books and articles of the documentary record as a primary shaper of historical memory.

The reader of *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life* will experience a sense of having travelled back in time, to walk streets and shorelines, to visit the cultural sites and see the artifacts of a contested world. This early modern remit is a space shared by the poet and the historian where Othello, the man, is to be found between the chinks of what happened and what might have been: The space within which to imagine the life (a real life) Othello might have lived. I build on Shakespeare's poetically imagined but culturally informed foundation. In my construct of Othello's imagined life, I create (adopting the idiom of theatre scholar Joseph Roach) a fictive "surrogation."¹³¹⁹ Meaning that this biography of Othello both aggregates and synthesizes the real experience of Africans and Africans of the Diaspora in the Black Atlantic – the privileged and the not so fortunate that Othello's story reifies.

Why Othello?

Any study of Shakespeare rests upon a paucity of dissatisfying facts that raise more questions than they answer, such as the foremost one, which Stephen Greenblatt poses in *Will in the World*: "So how did this grammar schooled, glove-maker's son become the most esteemed playwright of his age?" The historical record of Shakespeare's life – or rather I should say the lack of a historical record – is, alas, a natural consequence of the age in which

the poet lived, and it leaves us with very little evidence that is indisputably concrete upon which to build: there are no letters, diaries, memoirs, interviews, no notes or manuscripts in the archives – other than the published works, just a will, a few records of real estate transactions, personal and family birth, marriage and baptismal records, a few legal transactions and a court case.

So how in his marvelous biography of Shakespeare does Greenblatt, the renowned Harvard professor, resolve the million-dollar question, “How did Shakespeare become Shakespeare?” Is there any way for an achievement of this magnitude to be explained? Yes, but it requires adopting a somewhat contentious strategy. Because it can be claimed that knowledge of a writer’s life may shed light on the creative work, and that - on the other hand - the work itself can disclose the life, Greenblatt reconstructs a life Shakespeare may have lived by looking for clues linking actual events that occurred in Tudor and Stuart England during the poet’s lifetime to evidence of Shakespeare’s experience of those happenings in his plays and poems. He proceeds on the premise that the author’s output offers a tantalizing source for clues to his life. Greenblatt depends on, as he notes, “One of the prime characteristics of Shakespeare’s art is the touch of the real.”

I take a similar stance.

To understand how he did this so effectively, it is important to look carefully at his verbal artistry – his command of rhetoric, his uncanny ventriloquism, his virtual obsession with language. To understand who Shakespeare was, it is important to follow the verbal traces he left behind back into the life he lived and into the world to which he was so open. And to understand how Shakespeare used his imagination to transform his life into his art, it is important to use our own imagination.¹³²⁰

The mystery at the core of *Othello* is why *Othello* exists at all. With the ingrained forces of cultural isolationism and color prejudice working against him, why did William

Shakespeare introduce a foreign black hero onto the English Renaissance stage who speaks the most beautiful language he or any other poet ever expressed? Why did Shakespeare challenge received information to make a black man the head of the Venetian armed forces, tasked to defend all of Christendom from the Ottoman Turks, in a world where Africans were universally thought of as heathens, as slaves and devils? The answers lie in reconstituting not only what but *who* might have informed the poet's worldview when he produced *Othello* for the London stage – both contexts and sources I investigate – in addition to the books Shakespeare read, the plays he attended, the music he heard, the art he witnessed and the cultures he explored – the life Shakespeare led and whom he loved. The influences on Shakespeare are manifest in the literature he created. Shakespeare's expression of blackness shifted markedly from the gross characterizations of a black man as pure evil, which he conveyed in his portrait of Aaron in an earlier work, *Titus Andronicus*, to the anarchic appearance of a “noble” black man as a victim of racism, in *Othello*. The most striking change from Aaron to Othello is the experience of empathy in the viewer. How did such a change come about? It is my contention that it is in Shakespeare's personal life that the clues to this transformation are to be found, including Shakespeare's own experience as a provincial outsider in class conscious and status driven Elizabethan London.

Perceived “racial” distinctions when encoded into law have served to disenfranchise Americans of African origin – deemed to be discrete and inferior beings - from the rights of citizenship. Historically, black identity signifies enslavement, white identity entitlement. Among the host of scholars who have forged the truth that “race” has no biological basis but is an arbiter of power relationships, Franz Boas, the German-American, father of modern anthropology, and W.E.B. DuBois, the African-American historian, social activist and

NAACP co-founder, were at the first. Someday, hopefully, everyone will recognize these truths. Unfortunately, the counterfeit historical understanding of race still has far too much influence on what determines where we end up in life. Tragically, for all its redefinition, the mythologies of race persist.

The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life is about how Europeans created their own identities in the process of confronting human difference, and in so doing formed and codified prejudices based on skin color. It was in the eighteenth century that race became biological to white observers, “a physical matter that inhered in the black and amoral bodies of slaves.”¹³²¹ It was the moment when the emphasis shifted to “anatomy” from “environment and culture” to explain observable physical difference among the peoples of the earth.¹³²² This critical development is the antecedent to the formation of the racial ideologies that spawned the notorious scientific racism of the late nineteenth century, which is attributable to false anthropological typologies.¹³²³

Othello’s blackness matters. He is featured as a blackamoor – a sub-Saharan African. The narrative history that Othello is of royal African blood, captured and sold into slavery is entirely of Shakespeare’s construction. Certainly, Shakespeare emphasized Othello’s blackness for his own dramaturgical purposes to make a statement about race. Iago’s racism – “his malign malignity” – his motive to destroy Othello is a deeply disturbing condition of the time.

The tragic story of *Othello*, with its doomed interracial love affair at the core of its action, cannot be reduced to some tawdry domestic drama of the bedroom that results in a jealous husband killing the wife he believes to have betrayed him, as some would have it. Rather *Othello* is a play about the increasingly unstable social order of the early modern world

that stressed local customs and mores through the cross-cultural contact of a new globalism, challenging standard assumptions about what was acceptable and normative. It is a play about European expansion and conquest and the advent of imperialism with all its attendant fractured upheaval and dislocation. For some, even a black man of Othello's gifts and accomplishments, who would presume to compete for white womanhood, was an existential threat to European hegemony.

Othello's tragedy is not that of a gulled husband - but he is often dismissed as a dupe: as an incapable black man who too easily succumbs to a white man's clever handling.

Because of this, for some, *Othello* is a racist play. I do not think that is an apposite assessment, although I understand that for some readers of the play "may feel that Shakespeare's *Othello*, rather than expressing a 'compassionate' view of a black man and 'challenging racial stereotypes' reinforced both xenophobia and racial stereotypes (the xenophobia and through the expression of others' racism toward Othello, the racist stereotypes through Othello carrying out the savage murder of his wife in the end)."¹³²⁴

Othello is not a racist play – it is a play about racism. It is not a misogynist play – it is a play that challenges patriarchy and paternalism. Noble Othello is the tragic, unguarded victim of a truly vicious racist attack coming from a most unexpected and trusted source – his comrade in arms. Desdemona is destined to be misunderstood because as a woman she has transgressed against the patriarchal order of her time.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare contests racism and exposes the dangers of patriarchy.

As Tilden Edelstein insightfully suggests: "Neither menial servant nor slave, but a black man of royal birth, Othello, in this era, was qualified to marry Desdemona. Only the racially prejudiced could disagree."¹³²⁵ Iago, Othello's subordinate officer, and Desdemona's

father, Brabantio, represent the racially prejudiced in the world of Shakespeare's drama. Desdemona and the Duke of Venice represent the racially tolerant. The position the head of state and the bride share so prevails over Brabantio's objections that – were it not for Iago's obsession that Othello is unworthy for power and prestige because he is black - Othello and Desdemona would have lived a happy life. In a nod to custom, Desdemona does acknowledge that she has traded her past life for a life with Othello that some may scorn her for: "That I did love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world."

The Changer and the Changed

Compulsive, unbridled, essentialist hatred eats at the villain of the play. That Iago must subordinate the white male privilege, to which he is born, to the Moor, sticks ineffably in his craw. As long as Othello was useful to him for advancing his own career, Iago could tolerate a black man as his superior. But in his mind, Othello has betrayed him denying him the promotion he considers his right in favor of a man he does not respect. That Othello has won Desdemona – not only a white woman, but also a paragon of her sex for whom Iago himself has fashioned a lust – has triggered that proverbial straw; and Iago's paranoia propels him to the conclusion that the "lascivious Moor" has also slept with Emilia – his wife. Iago's pure unadulterated racist animus for this black man kicks in, triggering his own feelings of inadequacy and injustice. These classic features of the racist personality spur his motive to destroy Othello.

Iago is a political assassin. And yet, in the final reckoning, Iago's racist ideology is vanquished in the tragedy of Othello. Iago is exposed. We see the racist for the evil he does in the world with his hate. Iago loses the war for hearts and minds in the eyes of the viewer for his persecution of a good man simply because he is black. Identity does not - should not - determine capacity. A man, Shakespeare establishes, should be judged for his actions in the world, not by the color of his skin.

Loving the other is a part of life.

Tragically, Othello does not have enough of a grasp on the context of his circumstances to defend against such a diabolical manipulator. Iago is his closest companion in the entire universe. They have had years on the military campaign trail together - here, there and everywhere. They are comrades in arms bound by the natural fellowship of soldiers who have defended each other's lives on the field of battle. There is also the implication that in both Othello and Iago's ghastly actions in the course of the play that to be a veteran of war makes you unknowably monstrous. An experiential other.

Iago and Othello share a culture common to them, and hence a common culture, the military. But not in Venice. They are not of a pair in civilian society. Othello cannot escape - for all his claim to rank and class in Venetian society as general of the armed forces - being perceived as a fantastically foreign figure. After all, the white Italian city-state is a domain in which Othello's exoticism permits him to be accused of resorting to witchcraft to ensnare Desdemona. What redeems Othello's otherness is his Christian faith. (He is the first Christian Moor presented on the English stage.) Nonetheless, Othello knows his social status is conditioned upon his continuing service to Venice. A service he performs with a modest self-effacing mien that masks the complexities of Othello's vulnerable temperament. Othello, is

lulled into a complacency that denies him the ability see around corners and anticipate what is happening to him.

Who should he trust? How can he trust? Who can he trust? Iago – the most likely candidate – is a traitor. A traitor to their human bond. Iago succeeds in inveigling his commanding officer partly because Othello is too credulous, yes. But, Othello is also victimized by his own incongruity, by his inability to read behavior in a man who is familiar but of a culture to which Othello is alien. Iago is white, after all. And for all his accomplishments Othello is still black. Othello is not a dupe – he is out of his element. He is “a stranger” from “here, and everywhere.” In a later time his travels and adventures, is diversity of lie experience would label him *cosmopolitan*. Yet, in renaissance Venice, Othello’s very worldliness works against his sensitivity to the parochialism of the closed white society of Venice that he has recently entered and been celebrated by – and within which he has publicly snubbed Iago. The very qualities and service that have brought Othello social empowerment make him feel falsely secure. In the environment of the play, Othello expects (and has ever right to expect based on past experience) to be judged by his deeds - not his color. He does not expect to be judged by Iago under any circumstances. Iago is his ensign. He is beneath Othello’s rank. His capacity to be hurt does not rise to Othello’s notice. The general cannot begin to fathom that Iago is festering with anger. He has no sense of Iago’s fit of high dudgeon. That his ensign is stewing at having wasted years in unrewarded service, only to be forced to endure black Othello’s rise through the ranks over him – a white man. And now Othello has promoted the undeserving Casio to lieutenant in his stead. Othello’s inability to accurately read Iago is his tragic flaw. It is not so surprising. Iago is a master trickster. A diabolical chameleon of notably vibrant colors, who can turn on a dime

and assume the fawning flatterer. If anything, Othello has been seduced by a sense of invulnerability that has come with his command. As a black man of the early modern Atlantic world, he should know better: no good comes from placing unconditional trust in any white man – even (perhaps especially) an unctuous sycophant over whom he has absolute control.

Not to confront *Othello* on racial terms is to deny the meaning of the play. When a black actor plays Othello, if ethnicity and racist ideology are given no credence in the play's interpretation, then Othello is in danger of being perceived as more the buffoon by audiences who have not had their racial attitudes and latent stereotypes challenged, for his innocence and trusting nature. That was certainly Sidney Poitier's concern. The iconic black movie star who burst on the scene in the sixties saw so much controversy in playing Othello he eschewed the role altogether. Othello's popularity with famous black actors (Paul Robeson in particular) notwithstanding, Poitier was not convinced that Othello – the man who could be so easily tricked by a white man into strangling his wife for infidelity was a positive image, despite Othello's cultural status and commanding persona. It was a lose-lose proposition for Poitier. Lose your black audience for being a fool. Lose your white audience for killing one of their women.¹³²⁶

Paul Robeson (fig. 182) **Error! Reference source not found.** the first black actor to portray Othello on Broadway (in 1942) saw the role differently from Poitier. For Robeson, “Othello has taken away from me all kinds of fears, all sense of limitation, and all racial prejudice. Othello has opened me to new and wider field; in a word, Othello has made me free.”¹³²⁷

Like Ira Aldridge (fig. 5) before him Robeson recognized *Othello* “as the tragedy and pathos of a black man in a white world.”¹³²⁸ Robeson saw Othello as a representative black

man whose noble character challenged deep-rooted prejudices about his race. Others take the opposite view. I am fully aware that for some Othello's credulity and his heartless murder of Desdemona has and can be viewed as expressions of racial stereotype – of diminished intellectual capacity and innate savagery as a black man. But Othello's actions have nothing to do with his being black: he is not a jealous man because he is black, nor does he murder Desdemona because he is black. However, Iago's hatred towards Othello, which leads him to goad Othello's jealousy and murderous rage, comes from his hatred of Othello's blackness. And he preys on Othello's consciousness of his otherness and his anxiety in his blackness.

And not in Shakespeare's cannon is an irrationally jealous, homicidal husband the soul province of the Moor. As developed by the playwright, Othello's belief in Desdemona's infidelity is far more justified than is King Leontes of Sicily's in *The Winter's Tale*. Jealousy – “the green-eyed monster” – is even more unjustly expressed in this later play than in *Othello*. Like Othello, Leontes sees fault where no fault lies. And there is no Iago-like character to goad the King of Sicily on. He creates the fantasy of his queen's infidelity with his best friend all on his own without a twisted malefactor whispering lies in his ear. Leontes is equally full of murderous rage towards the wife he suspects of betraying him with his best friend as is Othello. It is only that Queen Hermione, conveniently “dies” before she can be put to death by her royal husband for her supposed sexual transgression that cruel justice is stayed. Leontes actions have further lethal consequence: his young son and heir dies of grief over what has befallen his mother.

It is hard to consider *The Winter's Tale* plotline without thinking of how Henry VIII executed Queen Elizabeth's mother on trumped up charges of adultery. Lear says in the play that carries his name: “Adultery? Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No.” As if being put to

death for adultery were a crazy idea. But do we not have in the collective memory of the age the case of Anne Bolyn as an example of just that?

In another late work, *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare again takes up the theme of marital infidelity – of innocence and jealousy – this time set in the Wales of Ancient Britain. In this play it is King Cymbeline’s daughter Imogen, who is wrongly accused of being unfaithful to her husband Posthumus. Imogen only escapes death at the hands of her husband for her adultery by fleeing the kingdom when the servant Posthumus has sent to kill her helps her escape. The Iago figure reappears in this play as an evil trickster poisoning her husband’s mind and out to bring down the guiltless princess. But this time he is exposed early enough that all can end well for Imogen and Posthumus.

“I loved Othello for his mind,” says Desdemona. Well, he proves himself not to be as exceptional as Desdemona has imagined. No more exceptional than Posthumus, King Leontes or King Henry VIII. The humiliation of the perceived adultery is in the inevitable acknowledgement that these men could not meet the sexual needs of their wives, so they sought satisfaction elsewhere. Each man believes that for this humiliation their wives should die. And they are self-righteous in enacting their revenge. It is easy to imagine why Shakespeare waited until the reign of Elizabeth’s successor, King James I, before he put each of these three plays whose plots revolve around adultery on the stage.

Cymbeline clearly owes plotlines to both *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale*. The gulling of Posthumus by a malevolent comrade by means of a similar trick involving a personal possession of the wife also stands out. As does the similarity between the names of the villains Iago and Iachimo.

Santiago is Spanish for James or Jacob. In Hebrew, Jacob means one who undermines.

St. James (Santiago) is the patron saint of Spain, which was at war with England from 1585-1604, thus the name was a hostile sound to English ears. St. James of Spain's surname Matamoros means killer of the Moors as the saint often led military campaigns against those people in the 15th century.¹³²⁹

What is fascinating is that the play set in Venice, *Othello*, underscores Iago's role as the Moor killer by giving him the Spanish name. The play set in Britain, makes the villain of the play Italian, and thus he gets the Italian form of the name, but it is the version of the name that is local to Venice.

Is 'Othello' any good?

In his 1999 essay, "Second Thoughts About Othello," the Ghanaian born, British black actor Hugh Anthony Quarshie (fig. 183) takes the position that Othello is a racial stereotype, irrespective of how he is played: "When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in black make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men?" Quarshie arrives at the position, "Of all the parts in the canon, perhaps Othello is the one which should most definitely not be played by a black actor." Quarshie would seem to be saying that the perspective of a four-hundred-year-old dead white male playwright is – in and of itself – relative to time and place, and, thus, Shakespeare is an invalid spokesman for the black man. In essence, that Shakespeare even if enlightened for his time, in the end, others the other. Quarshie's is an essentialist – if valid – reading of race on his own terms.¹³³⁰

The white, English Critic Clive Barnes, not so many years ago, expressed the view in *The New York Times* that black actors should not play Othello because their performances were too "obvious" in the part. Barnes instructed directors and audiences to remember, after all, that Shakespeare wrote the part for a white actor appearing in blackface (see other famous actors who played Othello appearing in blackface, fig. 184, fig. 185, fig. 186, fig. 187, fig. 188).¹³³¹

The collaboration between Toni Morrison **Error! Reference source not found.** and Peter Sellars on Morrison's *Desdemona* (fig. 189), Morrison conversation with Shakespeare through her interpretive response to *Othello* required Morrison to convince Sellars that *Othello* was worthy of his attention. According to Morrison Sellars' found Shakespeare's text

too thin. Morrison convinced him that the problems with the play with its productions, not the playscript. “The play is really interesting,” she recently asserted.¹³³²

I would assert that at least two productions of the play produced within the last five years are “really interesting,” indeed superb.

As Vincent Carretta notes in his biography of the black, British abolitionist Olaudah Equiano (who compared his story with Othello’s as a literary device,), when speaking of Shakespeare’s play, the “most famous literary instance of intermarriage in the tragic figure of African sexuality and power,” there is bound to be controversy.¹³³³

In *The Biography of Othello, a Signifying Life*, the Othello story is told as a reckoning of both our aspirational and our inimical selves when confronting the great matter of race, over time and in our time. Although always among the most popular and frequently performed plays in Shakespeare’s pantheon for its overwhelming emotional impact, “*Othello*,” to quote Edward Pechter, “has become the tragedy of choice for the present generation”¹³³⁴ as the first play about color ever written. Shakespeare’s racial attitudes are relevant today because he forever changed the discourse around race with *Othello* functioning as a cultural marker of racial attitudes. He created in the character of Othello a signifier of difference, both formed by and informing the racial consciousness of his age. Ever since, Othello’s blackness has been denotative: each and every consequent reading or performance of Othello is excursive, a reenactment of all previous performances and readings, shaping the present moment and the current politics of representation and race. Othello is not only a “cultural artifact” of its time but a “cultural artifact of all the moments that give [it] permanence.”¹³³⁵

In *Othello*, Shakespeare allows white spectators and readers who harbor racial anxiety

to confront their deepest desires alongside their most intense fears about blackness. The legacy of five centuries of the Atlantic slave trade and pernicious racial injustice have kept it alive. Single-handedly, Shakespeare expanded the sphere of his countrymen's shared moral interest – and, by virtue of *Othello's* enduring influence, ours, as well. *Othello* allows readers who are black to locate themselves in his presence, his history and his legacy.

Let us be reminded that it is only over the past fifty-plus years that a critical mass of cross-disciplinary scholars and cultural journalists have intrepidly paved the way to bring salient, reifying details of the forgotten history of the presence of Africans in Renaissance Europe and in Britain to light. Literary scholars have forged ahead with many studies on the representation of *blackness* in early modern English drama. No doubt because the evidence is much more rewarding than the paucity of historical records. The contemporary literature, Shakespeare and his fellow poet/playwrights have left us, is *generative evidence* we have of a black presence in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. *Othello* is the *sine quo non* of this output of English Renaissance dramatists. I would argue, therefore that *Othello* itself is proof enough that black people were in Shakespeare's notice as well as in his imagination. Happily, with all the historical evidence that has come to light over the past twenty years – and is still coming, I do not have to leave it at that.

There is just enough documentary evidence to locate Africans in early modern Britain, and to identify them with real people and real events. Thus *Othello* can truly be understood as an important artifact of historical *experience* – not just the poet's imagination. The text is reflexive: it is the event directed back on itself. But in this process the playwright is not passive. He not only represents he comments on what he has observed. Offering us an inbuilt critique of the society he lives by providing a searing indictment racist thought. With

Shakespeare there is this capacity to tap into the collective conscience and trigger gnosis with an epiphanic moment – or what I call the shock of recognition.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare tackles what he understood it to mean to be black in the early modern Atlantic world – viewed, of course, from the perspective of his undeniably circumscribed cultural context as an Englishman, certainly – but *also*, I avow, from his informed consciousness as an artist. It is in the astonishing way that Shakespeare’s consciousness transcends the context of his time—the stock characters liberated from bigotry and stereotype – that one sees an empathy in Shakespeare that can only come from personal experience: empathy that prompts a compassion for suffering.

The evidence is the play.

Othello the Man, a Signifying Life

Who is Othello? Based on all the evidence provided in this study, I ask you to consider Othello's story as if he were a sixteenth century Ashanti prince of the blood. We will call him Otoló, an Akan name for males identified by Kwasi Konadu in his book *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas* (2010). Akan is the language group of the Ashanti. Otoló is a variation of "Otuo."¹³³⁶

In his article, "The Sociolinguistics of Akan Personal Names," Ghanaian linguist Kofi Agyekum identifies the name "Otuo" as a derivation of the male given name Kofi – which in Akan literally means born on Friday. "Among the Ashanti the boy's name Otuo means "the wanderer, the traveller:" In a private e-mail to me, Professor Agyekum further clarifies: "The noun Otuo comes from another etuo which means 'gun' the name Otuo will then mean that the one is very powerful." A warrior. How apt this naming source is for our hero on so many fronts.¹³³⁷

Based on lines that Shakespeare's has his protagonist himself utter, he is a self-described soldier of fortune. In referencing his past, he defines himself as a warrior from boyhood ("seven years' pith"), who, descending from "men of royal siege," was "taken by the insolent foe" (presumably in battle) and "sold into slavery." From these clues, it is evident that the man who becomes "The Moor of Venice" was born into privilege – he is an African prince. The internecine warfare that pitted people against neighboring people in fueling the Atlantic slave trade was a West African practice. So, the lead in this drama is, by origin, West African. As an Ashanti he is from present day Ghana.

The use of the word “siege” by Shakespeare provides convincing evidence in further establishing his character’s identity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “siege,” in first order, as “A seat, *esp.* one used by a person of rank or distinction.” The ancient Akan people (subgroups Ashanti and the Fante) have a long tradition of chieftaincy within a proscribed hierarchy: the highest rank is that of a Paramount chief. The Paramount chief of the Ashanti is the *Asantehene*, or king (fig. 190) **Error! Reference source not found.** The power of the chief is not only symbolized, but also embodied in his ceremonial seat of office. Instead of a throne, Akan Chieftains sit on a stool. As an icon of leadership, each Akan ruler is presented with his own stool (fig. 191)**Error! Reference source not found.**, which is indelibly tied to both his person and his rank. The golden stool is the seat of the *Asantehene*. When a ruler dies his stool – his “royal siege” – is retired. It is from this line of nobility that our man Otoló is descended.

When Shakespeare says his hero was taken by the “insolent foe” and “sold into slavery” it makes sense to imagine that he was enslaved by Muslims given the use of the signifier “insolent.” What is more of an affront a rejection of one’s own god? We now know that beginning in the fifteenth century Muslims penetrated and influenced some of the coastal states, including the Akan. The Mande had a lively trading entrepôt at the northern edge of the Akan forest country called Bighu (Begho) near the present-day village of Hani. It was a major commercial center for Asante and Dyulu traders. Nonetheless, in spite of regular contact the Akan were not Islamicized. And there is evidence that cloth (fig. 192) **Error! Reference source not found. Error! Reference source not found.** made by the Asante in Kumasi was influenced in its fabrication by decorative signs or *khawatim* (Islamic magical squares) that

were used as charms. And there are records of the Mande trading in Costa da Mina in the sixteenth century. So a Muslim presence in the land of the Akan is established.¹³³⁸

Of course these records are rare and from so long ago, but there is enough evidence to provide for the possibility that Otoló was captured in a conflict between the Asante and the Muslim Mande in the late fifteenth century and then sold to a slave trader. His status as a prince (fig. 193)**Error! Reference source not found.** served him no special accommodation. We know that many family members of African rulers were lost to the slave trade.

He would have been transported out of his native land after having been held at the slave castle of Elmina, which was constructed and finished in its present form in 1482. His passage to Europe would have been on a Portuguese Caravel and he would have been unloaded in the southern most port of Lagos in Portugal. The hideous scene of the first Portuguese slave auction Zurara recorded in 1444 is what Otoló would have experienced on arrival. He would next have been transported by boat and processed at the Lisbon Slave House. A heinous experience. Otoló's next destination is likely to have been Seville, which was the largest slave market in Europe. Now let us project that Otoló, because of his strength and his military prowess, was bought to serve as a mercenary. Thus, we can imagine him among the black African slave soldiers who fought on the Muslim side at the Battle of Malaga in Islamic Spain in 1487. A major three-month-long conflict that ended with the fall of the city, the chief seaport of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada.

Otoló's next stop would be Rome, because after the siege, his entire surviving contingent of seasoned and brave fighters was gifted to the Pope. At the Holy See because of his intelligence and fine character he would have been favored in the papal household and

instructed in his conversion to Christianity. With such patronage, Otoló's pathway would soon lead him to serve the Republic of Venice and rise to become the leader of the city's force.

It is my deepest wish that anyone who reads this short life of Otoló will find it a story now possible to imagine. And that you, the reader, will have found in this study of Othello all the clues you need in to make it a journey of hope and possibility.

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EPILOGUE

You never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.

– Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)¹³³⁹

*LEAR. ...Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.*

–William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 4

Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes.

– Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1924)¹³⁴⁰

As a woman, I cannot imagine how impoverished I would feel not to have known, for example, these sisters: Juliet, Rosalind, Viola, Imogen, Lady Macbeth, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer: all women born in the creative minds of men. In her essay, “If Shakespeare Had a Sister, featured in her groundbreaking and still relevant feminist tract, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf (fig. 194)**Error! Reference source not found.**, a great writer in her own right, compares from her vantage point of nearly a century ago the history of women in fiction (written by men) to women in history (also written by men).

Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room.

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.¹³⁴¹

Thus, as Woolf so deftly argues, authors, male authors, have invested in women agency they did not have in real life. Such is the power of great writers.

With Woolf's argument in mind, and vesting myself with some particular authority based my own identity as a member of a marginalized group, allow me to speak to the issue of artistic license and authorial integrity with respect to Shakespeare and *Othello*. And let me take further the analogy for empathy with the black experience I have harnessed here.

As a member of the female sex I understand what it means to be denied access to opportunity. An issue for both women and people of color. I chafe as Virginia Wolf does at the knowledge that women not so long ago could not even imagine themselves as authors of their own stories because of historical prejudice and the suppression of their human rights – rights so celebrated at our nation’s founding. The words all *men* are created equal still stings as an existential slap in the face. Equal opportunity for countless years was denied women in this country due to lack of access to education and the denial of independent legal standing. The prevailing pernicious belief in women’s innate incapacity promulgated by a culture of patriarchy is an uphill battle woman have had to fight – *forever*.

Not, of course, to the same degree black Americans have, but in some relational measure, which makes the unique struggle black women have faced almost unimaginable. Brenda Stevenson has written a gripping compare and contrast monograph on this subject, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (1997). This is the kind of brilliant book that opens your eyes and changes your perspective on the world ever after.¹³⁴²

In her musings, Wolf writes about an imagined sister of William Shakespeare’s, Judith, and how she would have fared, as a woman in his place:

it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. No girl could have walked to London and stood at a stage door and forced her way into the presence of actor-managers without doing herself a violence and suffering an anguish which may have been irrational – for chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons – but were none the less inevitable.¹³⁴³

The fear of sexual violence and exploitation is a reality that binds women across

generations. Although it is true that all women in domestic service were vulnerable to their employer's predations, enslaved black women in the American slave system, were uniquely exposed to such abuse. The present-day issue of why violence against women is so pervasive speaks to the social constructs that continue to reinforce male hegemony over women. Dismantling gender hierarchy that has been baked into the culture over centuries is no easier than ending white privilege and institutional racism.

The issue of access to opportunity everybody knows is of profound concern and an abiding preoccupation of present day Hollywood. Inevitably the question of who has the right to tell whose story comes into question. The continuing under-representation of the under-represented – female, African American, Latinx and LGBT populations – in the face of an underdeveloped talent pool – underdeveloped by dint of experience denied – is a revealing oxymoron: There are not enough women and people of color to tell stories of their experience because there are not enough filmmakers who have been given the opportunity to tell their stories – and so on it goes, a Catch-22. No question, it was the culture of sexism with racist overtones that drove me to leave my career as a commercially successful film producer and studio executive in the studio system. It was a culture whose appeal was not worth the constant battles for recognition and the constant rejection of the kinds of stories that I wanted to tell – the stories of women and other under-represented groups. The men in charge valued my producerial skillset, but not my ideas.

For years on a shelf in my office I kept copies of the scripts, the books, and the plays that I wanted to produce but never got to. Over the years some were made by other producers as the times and circumstances became more favorable to the projects. Some were made into movies, some were made for television – some never got made at all. The one project I regret

the most never having made into a film was August Wilson's *Fences*. I saw *Fences* on the stage of the Yale Repertory Theatre where it premiered in 1985. The production starred James Earl Jones, Mary Alice and featured the professional debut of Courtney B. Vance. Lloyd Richards, who would become August Wilson's great collaborator and interpreter over a decades-long partnership, was the director. I knew Lloyd, for I had graduated from the Yale School of Drama only three years before with an MFA in theatre administration, and Lloyd Richards was my dean.

At the time I saw *Fences*, I was a young producer working in New York for Academy Award-winning director, Alan J. Pakula. My charge was to find projects that would be suitable for small films that I would produce under Alan's aegis as executive producer. With its wildly successful and critically acclaimed Broadway run, *Fences* should have been rife for a film adaptation. I wanted badly for Lloyd to get to direct this production, but Hollywood's racial politics proved insurmountable at the time. This would be the second time that Lloyd Richards was denied his opportunity to crack Hollywood as a director – simply because he was black. His first opportunity had been with Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* in the early sixties. Directing duties on that project went to Sidney Lumet – and it made his career.

Fences was finally released in 2016 under Denzel Washington's direction. Denzel also played the lead. In spite of the Lloyd Richards cautionary tale, who is going to do a good job telling stories and who deserves an opportunity to tell stories should not necessarily conflate, in my view, but we should be striving for these factors to align, for sure.

For a number of years in Hollywood as a white female feature film producer I had a black female producing partner in Deborah D. Johnson. When I was hired by Warner Bros. to produce *Doc Hollywood*, I brought Deborah on board with me. Deborah was the first African

American woman to produce a major motion picture that was not notable for its black content. This was an achievement to celebrate in the pantheon of racial and gender progress – you would think. But Deborah producing this important Warner Bros. picture starring Michael J. Fox along with me was such a shock to the sensibilities of one middle-aged white male production executives at Warner Bros. that he just could not get his mind around why I would share my “produced by” credit with “that black girl.” All he could do was express his utter disgust, horror, and profound disapproval at having his world view and his white male privilege challenged by a black/white team of young female producers when, sneering, he lashed out at me with the most unimaginable racist and sexist invective: “What is she your maid? Or something else?”

Hollywood was not a place that I had ever sought to be part of. And to this day, I am grateful for the commercial success and the creative experiences I had there, but it was not a world aligned with my values – and so I left.

It is not an accident that “author” is at the root of “authority.” My argument for Shakespeare’s authority as a sixteenth century white man to author the experience of a sixteenth century black man is grounded in my abiding belief in the power of art and the transcendent genius of artists to universalize the particular. I vigorously assert that the salient factor in determining who tells a story, should be in the power of the telling. The power of the telling is subjective, of course. How the power of the telling stands up as art is what critics arbitrate and ultimately, what the public decides. A work of art is deemed great art when it holds up under such scrutiny over time and becomes a part of the zeitgeist as an expression of our commensurability as human beings. The individual artist’s supreme value is in expanding how we understand our own experience through the experience of others. Thus we should

treasure artists' capacity to transcend self in their own lives and speak to what we share in common through the works they create. Like *Othello*.

For it is in our encounter with the arts that we figure out who we are, what we think, and what is important to us – both individually and collectively. The arts are an abiding source of ideas and a wellspring of inspiration, which gives us insight into the complexities and ambiguities of the human condition, benefits we sorely need as a culture right now. The arts teach us empathy: they provide an opportunity for each of us to walk in someone else's shoes or see through someone else's eyes. There is a reason it is a truism to observe that through shared stories we find our common humanity and the call to make a difference in other people's lives. Through the arts we gain not only a collective consciousness but a conscience. And it is through artistic expressions that we convey our convictions and outlook on the world, which is why the arts are considered so dangerous to those in power who are threatened by critique. It is why artists are censored by governments.

I would argue that what Shakespeare has done in his tragedy of the Moor of Venice is to inhabit the experience of Othello as Other, and through the powers of his invention he has placed himself and the reader/spectator within it. He achieves this by reaching us through an exquisite act of empathy that draws upon both his knowledge and his imagination. Thus Shakespeare uses empathy as transformative act to transcend the boundaries of his own experience and enter the life of another. That's what great writers do. That's what *artists* do. *They create an equality of empathy.*¹³⁴⁴

Susan Solt: Portion of a Journal Entry
Friday, November 12, 2010
Ghana – “Ashanti Land”

Cloth

Today was a day to take in Ashanti culture. Jonathan, Paul and I drove to the villages outside Kumasi where they make the Kente cloth and Adinkra cloth (fig. 195)**Error!**

Reference source not found. Kente cloth, iconic as a symbol of Akan cultural heritage throughout the world, is known for its stunning bright colors – especially golden yellow – its geometric shapes, and striking designs. Once worn only by the Ashanti royal family, Kente cloth is now a popular ceremonial adornment. However, if a commoner comes before the royals wearing a cloth of the same motif the king has chosen for that day s/he has to go home and change. No one can be dressed in the same “suit” as the king.

Our first stop was in the village Bonwire. We visited a very commercial vender of handmade, silken Kente cloth. I got a solid taste of the hard sell in Ghana. Jonathan warned me that I would have to be very aggressive in my bartering to get the best price. I could see that Jonathan would be disappointed if I failed to cut the deal. The bolts of cloth were very beautiful and of extreme high quality. I think I did quite good job negotiating with the salesman. My years of antique shopping in the Catskills long ago seemed to pay off. I got the asking price cut in half, which Jonathon said was the best I could hope to do. I was pleased with the deal, but mostly because I made my Ghanaian guides proud. I was surprised and

moved by the bond that had formed so quickly between these two young men nearly half my age who were in charge of my African journey and me.

Our next stop was an Adinkra cloth workshop in Ntonso. This is an ages old family run business, and our guide was one of the sons: Peter. Peter – a long-time friend of Jonathan’s – is a very sophisticated, confident young man, sporting dreadlocks and wearing casual designer clothes. He was all the businessman – visibly gratified to be overseeing the artistic heritage that is his family birthright.

Adinkra cloth is printed cotton fabric. The ink is “cooked” from a special Northern bark that after deep soaking, pounding with a heavy pestle in a hollowed-out log, and days of simmering in an iron cauldron over open fire, resembles bubbling tar. The artisans use a hand squeegee silkscreen process for “mass” production and individual handmade wooden blocks – carefully dipped in the ink – to make the printed patterns on pristine expanses of fabric.

There are approximately 150 traditional glyph-like symbols in the available inventory – with ancient and modern versions of each. I was given the opportunity to try my hand at printing a 4” wide ribbon of cloth with one old and one modern sign, representing the same symbology. I selected - *Sankofa* – “I will return.” The result was elegantly simple and beautiful.

Before I left with bundles of fabric, Peter gave me a special Obama ribbon. Yes, Barack Obama’s face now adorns Adinkra cloth alongside the time-honored signs.

We then visited Adanwomase where you can observe the process of weaving Kente cloth. This was a special opportunity to see life in a rural Ghanaian village up close. As we walked along the packed earth, all the toddlers sang out “broni, broni, broni” with great glee

as I passed. (“Broni” is the Akan word for a white person.) These little ones are not visited that often by white folks, I was told.

I learned that men are the weavers among the Ashanti. The narrow looms they employ are the traditional wooden weaving machines they have used for generations. The weavers stretch the threads from a very long distance – 12 to 15 feet away from where they sit behind the warp beams. Kente cloth is woven in strips of about six inches wide and then sewn together. It is an exceptionally labor-intensive process. White and black were the traditional yarns. Older-style, simple, two-tone cloths are still spun by the weavers from cotton – not silk. The colorful silk yarns – red, green, black, yellow - which have been favored for a very long time, come from India and are delivered on spools.

I spoke at length with one of the weavers – a young man who has been doing this work for only three years – but who has already achieved the distinction of Level Three, the most intricate cloth-making. He is doing his job as a weaver to earn money to pay for college. His persistence, at what is for him extremely tedious, mind-numbing work, comes with the hope it will provide the means to a more promising future. It will take years. Yet, there were clearly career weavers among the workers, as well, older men who have been at making Kente cloth their entire lives. There were also young boys, weaving silently and efficiently, whose futures are unknown.

In the village of Adanwomase is a little shop run by the weavers’ collective that sells antique and contemporary Kente artworks. I walked in the door – and before even seeing and samples of fine cloth – I was dumbstruck. There high on the bare wall was a simply-framed, 9-x- 12-color-photograph of a bust of Shakespeare with a swath of colorful Kente cloth draped around his neck (fig. 196). There was no other ornament on the walls of the shop, and

it looked as if this picture had hung there a very long time. The colors were faded and the paper was buckling under the glass**Error! Reference source not found.**

Every choice, every decision I had made in my pursuit of clues to find Othello's story in Africa, now seemed to me providential.

The young women who greeted us had no idea who the bust in the picture represented, why it was there, and for how long. I know that for a small price I could have bought this remarkable photograph and taken it home to Los Angeles as a souvenir. But that felt to me like a violation. It pleased me no end to know that Shakespeare would continue to reside in Othello's homeland. I preferred to remember him there. Instead, I bought a small swath of brilliantly colored Kente cloth – as in the image – to drape across the shoulders of my own bust of Shakespeare, waiting for me in my study so far away.

NOTES

¹³³⁹ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York; 1993, 1982, ©1960; Pleasantville, N.Y.; London; Philadelphia: Warner : HarperCollins : Popular Library : International Collector's Library Reader's Digest Association Folio Society J.B. Lippincott, 2002), 8.

¹³⁴⁰ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), chap. Futurism; 120.

¹³⁴¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own. An Essay on Women in Relation to Literature*. (Pp. 172. L. & V. Woolf: London, 1929).

¹³⁴² Brenda E Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1997).

¹³⁴³ Virginia Woolf, "If Shakespeare Had a Sister, featured in her groundbreaking feminist tract, *A Room of One's Own. An Essay on Women in Relation to Literature*.

¹³⁴⁴ I was struck by reading this expression "equality of empathy" in an article in *Variety*, August 5, 2017 by Owen Gleiberman. I was also inspired by his article. Owen Gleiberman, "Should White Filmmakers Be Telling the Story of 'Detroit'?", *Variety*, August 5, 2017, <http://variety.com/2017/film/columns/should-white-filmmakers-be-telling-the-story-of-detroit-kathryn-bigelow-1202515567/>.

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE: ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 157. Unidentified artist, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, n/d. Extracted from Billmoyers.com. <http://billmoyers.com/2013/01/17/frederick-douglass-on-abraham-lincoln/2/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 158. Frederick Douglass' House Interior, 2018. National Park Service, Washington, D.C. Photograph by Robert Kelleman. On the right wall see Carl Ludwig Friedrich Becker's work, depicting a scene from *Othello* (fig. 159).



Figure 159. Carl Ludwig Friedrich Becker, *Othello Tells the Stories of His Adventures*, c.1880. Image modified by Ablakok. Frederick Douglass had a print of this work, as seen in fig. 158. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carl_Ludwig_Friedrich_Becker_-_Othello_opowiada_swoje_przygody.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 160. Charles Sherwin, *Mrs. Siddons in Desdemona*, 1785. Illustration to Bell's Shakespeare; Sarah Siddons as Desdemona in Shakespeare's 'Othello'; whole length, seated up in bed, right arm raised, wearing a nightgown and nightcap, a large blanket over her legs; in oval. Etching and engraving with stipple. The British Museum, London.



Figure 161. Richard James Lane, *Charles Kemble as Othello*, June 1840. Lithograph printed by Jérémie Graf, published by Colnaghi and Puckle, after Alfred Edward Chalon. National Portrait Gallery, London.

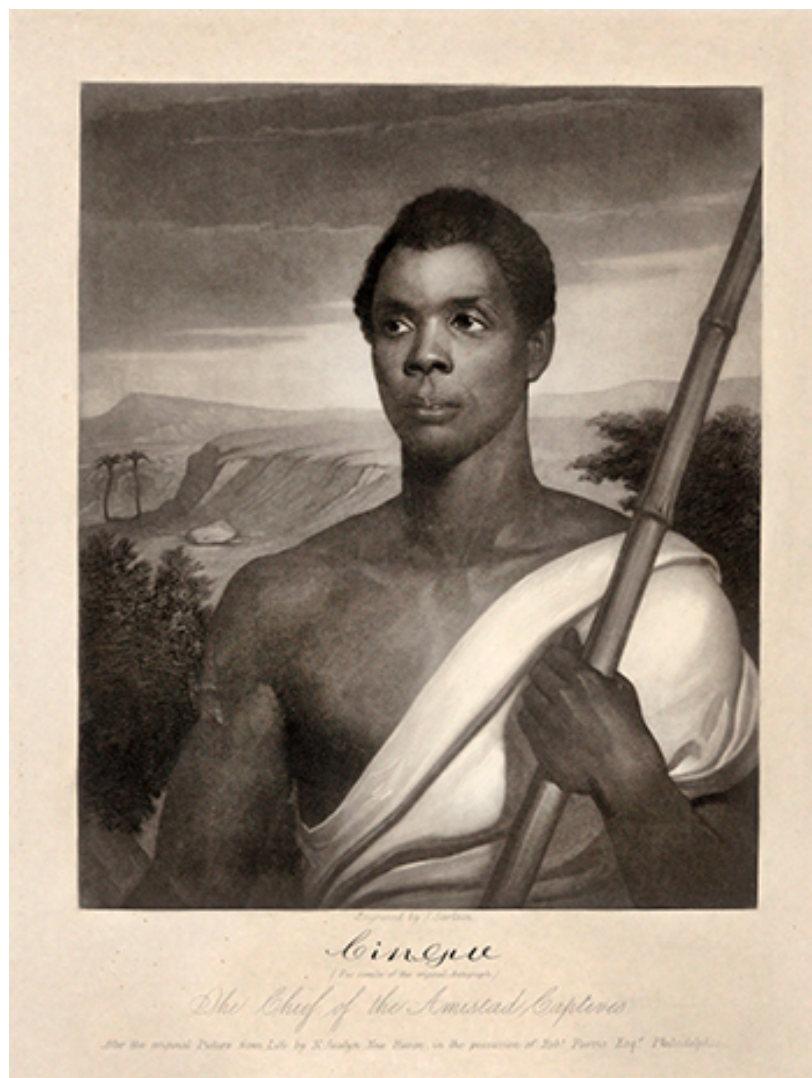


Figure 162. *Cinque*. Illustration reproduced from Davis, D. Brion, *Inhuman Bondage the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, chap. "The Amistad: Test of Law and Justice," (Oxford University Press, 2006). <https://newafrikan77.wordpress.com/2017/03/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 163. A slave coffle passing the Capitol grounds, 1815, published in *A Popular History of the United States*, 1876. Reproduced by ABCNews.go.com. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/fact-checking-lady-michelle-obamas-speech-white-house/story?id=40887848>, accessed December, 2017.

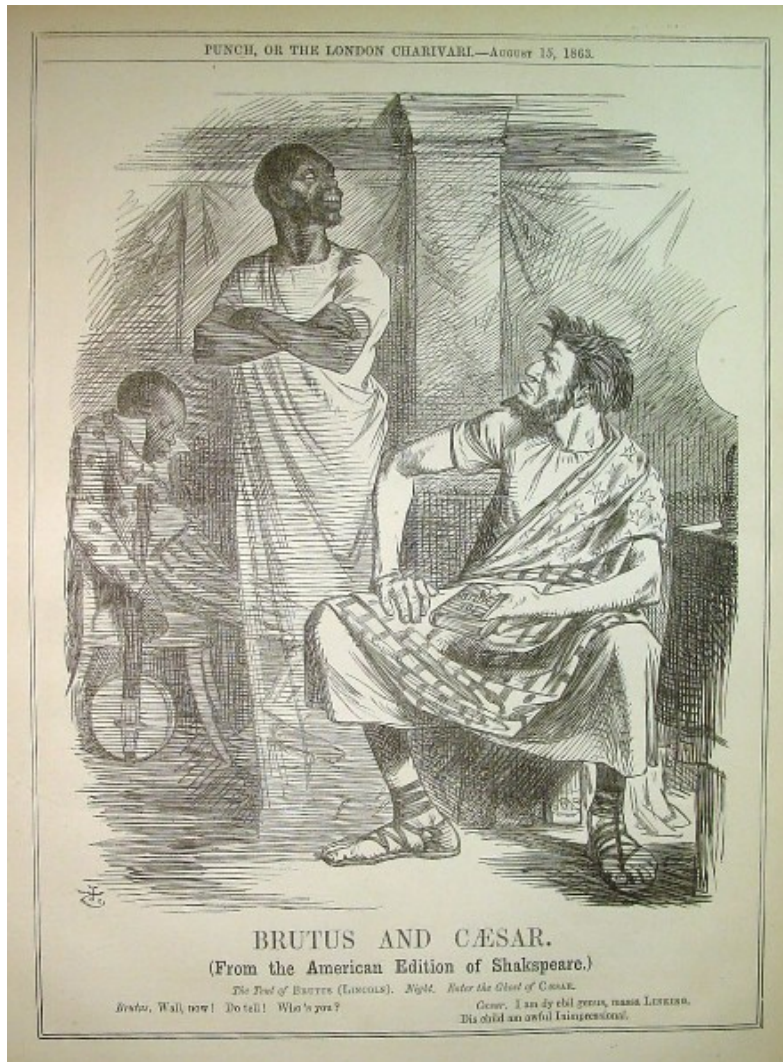


Figure 164. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Brutus and Caesar*, August 15, 1863. “Wall, now! Do tell. Who’s you?” exclaims Lincoln. “I am dy ebil genus, Massa Linking, Dis child am awful impressional.” Published by The History Gallery.com. <http://www.historygallery.com/prints/PunchLincoln/1863brutus/brutus&caesarMED.jpg>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 165. *The Genuine Othello Punch*, 1861. A political cartoon about slavery and the American Civil War. “In this cartoon, the slave is depicted as the real Othello quoting an approximation of a couplet from Shakespeare's play. He has been given a speaking style which shows the contemporary attitude to blacks. On the left of the slave is President Lincoln and on the right is President Davis. Both men are armed with long swords as they prepare for a fight to the death, but 'Othello' instructs them to put up their swords. From *Punch*, or the *London Charivari*, November 9, 1861.” Getty Images.

Washington, March 1. 1848

Friend Lynch:

Your letter of the 13th Feb. accompanying a recommendation of many citizens of Robt^o Swin for a lieutenancy, has been received. I suppose "Othello's occupation's gone" - All hands here seem to think the war is over - that the treaty sent us here by Trist will be ratified - If, however, a change presents, I will see the very best I can -

Excuse the shortness of this letter. I am really very much hurried.

Yours truly
A. Lincoln

Jesse Lynch
Magrolier
Ill.

Figure 166. Abraham Lincoln, Letter replying to Jesse Lynch about an officer commission during the U.S.-Mexican War and references to *Othello*, 1 March, 1848. The Shapell Manuscript Foundation. <http://www.shapell.org/manuscript/self-educated-abraham-lincoln-was-a-shakespeare-fan>, accessed December, 2017.

INAUGURATED TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 1861

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

31ST YEAR, 1891

119 TO 124 MONTAGUE ST., ADJACENT TO CITY HALL SQUARE.

OLDER, LARGER, BETER, AND SUPERIOR IN EVERY RESPECT TO ANY OTHER THEATRE IN THE CITY.

E. A. WEIR, SUPERINTENDENT.

3RD SEASON. 29TH WEEK

Col. WILLIAM E. SINN, AND MR. WALTER L. SINN, Of the Brooklyn Park Theatre. LINDSEY AND MANAGERS.

Wednesday Evening, April 1, 1891.

Messrs. Col. William E. Sinn and Mr. Walter L. Sinn have pleasure in presenting for a limited engagement, the Eminent Actor, Mr.

EDWIN BOOTH,

Supported by MISS GALE and a Competent Company.

THEODORE BROMLEV, Director.

In Shakespeare's Tragedy, Arranged in Six Acts:

OTHELLO, The Moor of Venice.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

OTHELLO	MR. EDWIN BOOTH
IAGO.....	Mr. JOHN A. LANE
BRABANTIO.....	Mr. BEN. G. ROGERS
CASSIO.....	Mr. BEAUMONT SMITH
RODERIGO.....	Mr. WILFRED CLARKE
DUKE OF VENICE.....	Mr. JAMES TAYLOR
MONTANO.....	Mr. FREDERIC VROOM
GRATIANO.....	Mr. ALBERT BRUNING
LODOVICO.....	Mr. EDWARD VROOM
PAULO.....	Mr. W. R. S. MORRIS
MARCO.....	Mr. HERBERT PATTEE
RULIO.....	Mr. GEORGE HAZELTON
HERALD.....	Mr. RANKIN DUVAL
MESSINGER.....	Mr. FRANK LODGE
DESEMONA.....	Miss GALE
ESILIA.....	Miss ANNA E. PROCTOR

EXECUTIVE STAFF FOR MR. BOOTH:

Business Manager..... Mr. JOSEPH J. LEVY	Treasurer..... Mr. JOSEPH ANDERSON
Stage Manager..... Mr. ROBERT M. EBERLE	Director of Vocal Music, Mr. W. R. S. MORRIS

ORCHESTRAL SELECTIONS.

By the Brooklyn Park Theatre Orchestra, Directed by F. W. PEYKESCHER.

1. OVERTURE—"The Temple of Minus,"	<i>Felton</i>
2. SELECTIONS—"Poor Jonathan,"	<i>Melbacher</i>
3. SCENE ET ARIA—"Romeo and Juliet,"	<i>Gounod</i>
4. FINALE—"Lehngren,"	<i>Wagner</i>
5. FANTASIE—"Faust,"	<i>Gounod</i>
DISMISSAL—"The Star-Spangled Banner."	

REPERTOIRE FOR THE WEEK.

MONDAY EVENING, MARCH 30.....	"HAMLET"
TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 31.....	"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"
WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 1.....	(Mr. Booth in the Title Role) "OTHELLO"
THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 2.....	"RICHARD III."
FRIDAY EVENING, APRIL 3.....	"MACBETH"
SATURDAY MATINEE, APRIL 4.....	"HAMLET"
SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 4.....	(By the Company) "ROMEO AND JULIET"

SCALE OF PRICES:

General Admission.....	75 Cents.	Family Circle.....	50 Cents.
Reserved Seats.....	\$1.50, \$1.00, 75 Cents.		

The Lobby Floral Display, by Julius Heimlich, of 121 Court Street.

See the Opposite Page Relative to Brooklyn Park Theatre Attractions.

Day Sale of Seats at CHANDLER'S, 300 Fulton Street.
OSCAR J. MURRAY, Ticket Agent.

THE SOMMER PIANOS ARE USED AT THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

Figure 167. Program of Edwin Booth's final performances, playing Othello, 1891. BAM Hamm Archives, New York. <http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2011/10/new-old-things-edwin-booths-hamlet.html>, accessed December, 2017.

BOSTON MUSEUM
 This Monday Evening, May 2, 1864,
 IN SHAKSPERE'S TRAGEDY OF
OTHELLO!
 WITH THE FOLLOWING POWERFUL CAST:

OTHELLO	J. WILKES BOOTH
Iago.....	Mr L. R. Shewell
Cassio.....	Mr J. Wilson
Duke of Venice.....	Mr J. Wheelock
Roderigo.....	Mr J. A. Smith
Brabantio.....	Mr F. Hardenburgh
Ludovico.....	Mr G. F. Ketchum
Gratiano.....	Mr T. M. Hunter
Montano.....	Mr Walter Benu
Julio.....	Mr J. E. Adams
Marco.....	Mr J. Peakes
Messenger.....	Mr J. Delano
	Senators, Gentlemen, etc.
Desdemona.....	Miss Kate Reignolds
Emelia.....	Miss Emily Mestayer

Figure 168. John Wilkes Booth, *Othello Playbill*, Boston Museum, 1864. Forsythes Auctions, LLC.

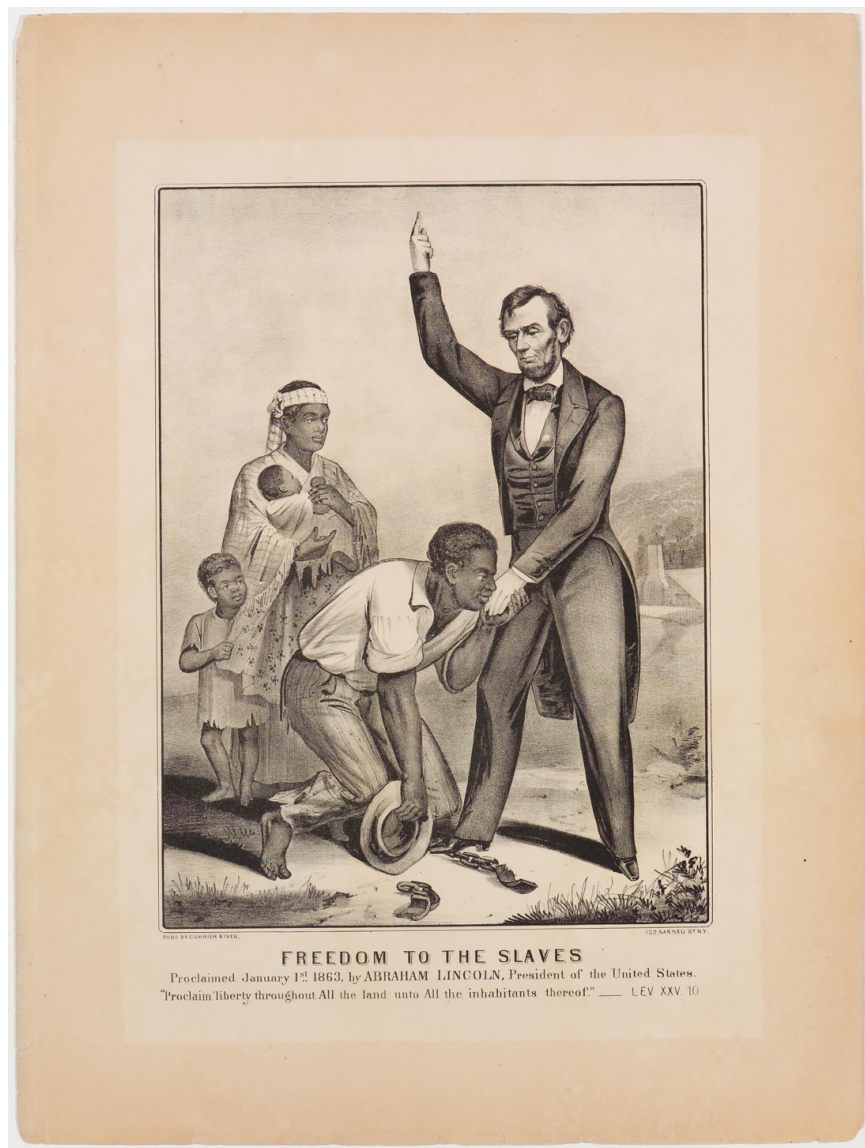


Figure 169. Currier & Ives, *Freedom to the Slaves. Proclaimed January 1st 1863. by Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States. "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land Unto All the Inhabitants Thereof,* n/d. Springfield Museums, MA.

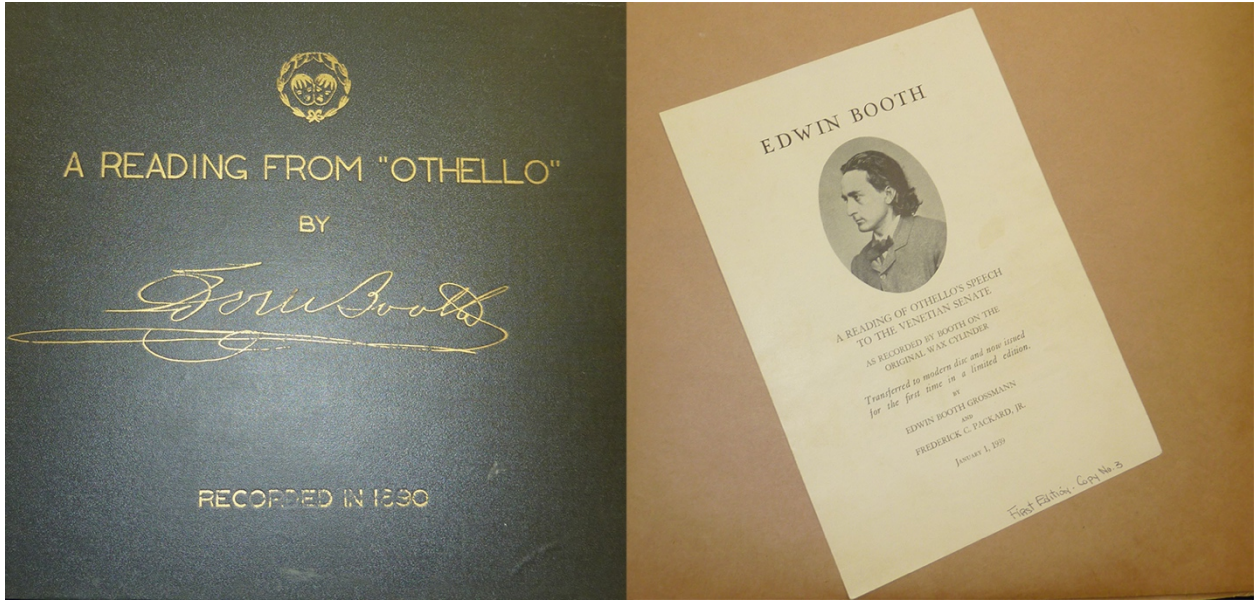


Figure 170. Edwin Booth, *A Reading from Othello*, 1890. Recording Cover. The Edwin Booth Family Collection. CSU Northridge Oviatt Library, Northridge, CA. http://library.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Exhibitions/reading_from_othello.jpg, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 171. James Earl Jones as Othello, 1981. Photograph by Afro-American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Image.



Figure 172. President Obama at the White House, c. 2009. Photograph by CNN.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 173. Controversial Vogue Magazine Cover showing LeBron James and Gisele Bündchen, April 2008.

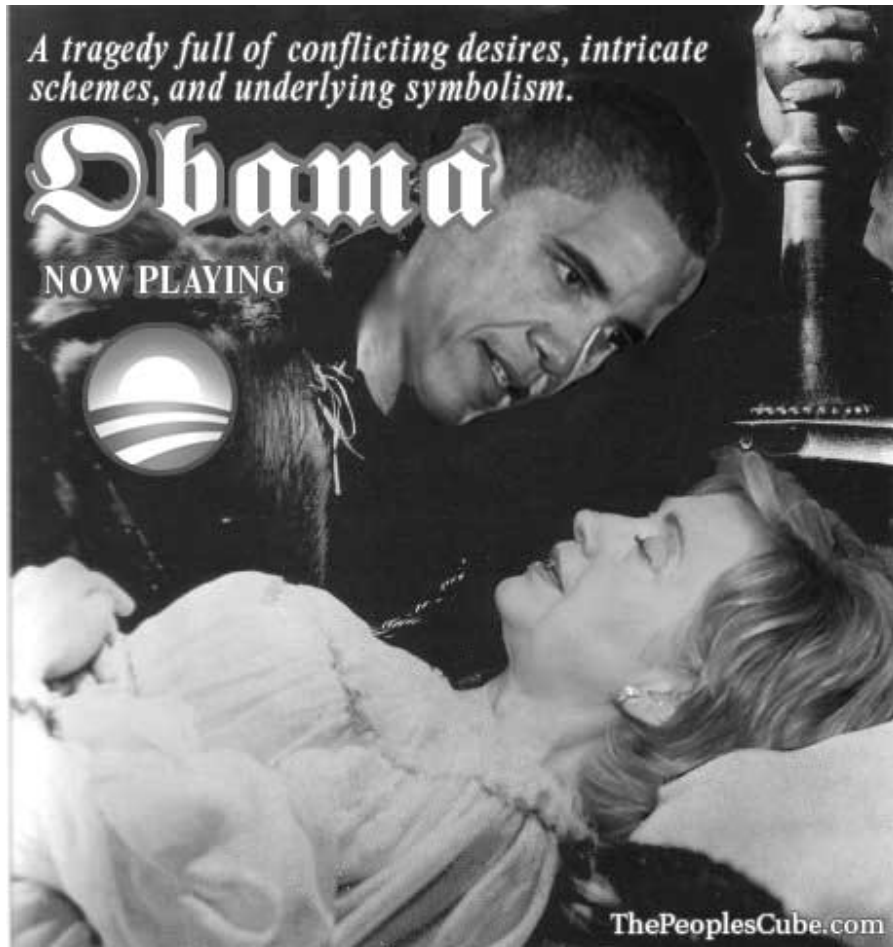


Figure 174. Obama as Othello, Hillary as Desdemona. The People's Cube.
Source: <http://thepeoplescube.com/current-truth/iowa-man-sues-clintons-for-mental-whiplash-t1642.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 175. Poster *Othello*, National Theatre London, 2013. Directed by Nicholas Hytner. NationalTheatre.org.uk, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 176. Cast of 2013, Othello and Desdemona on arrival at the base in Cyprus, *Othello* at the National Theatre, London. Directed by Nicholas Hytner. Photograph Courtesy of The Independent.com, accessed December, 2017.

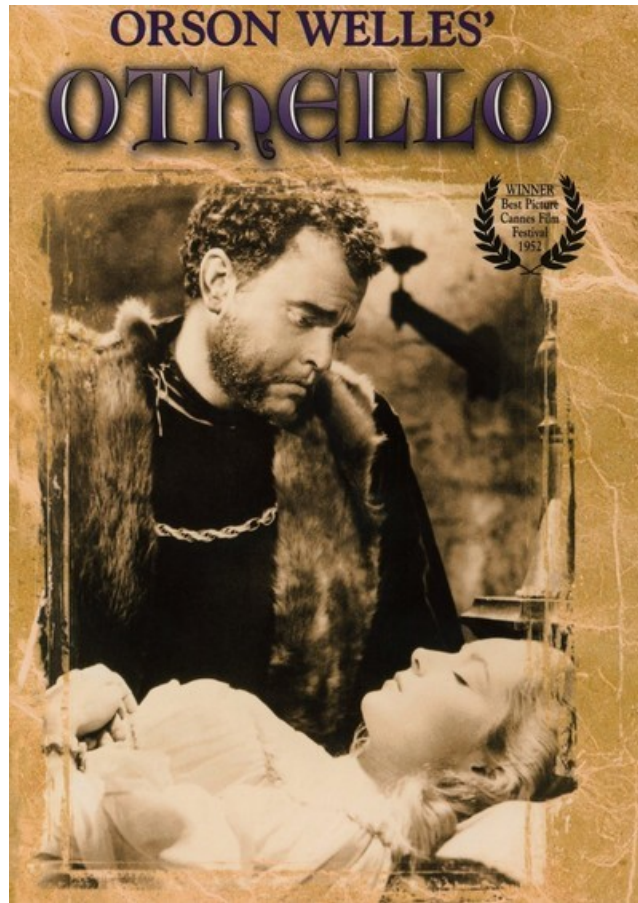


Figure 177. Orson Welles' *Othello*, 1952.

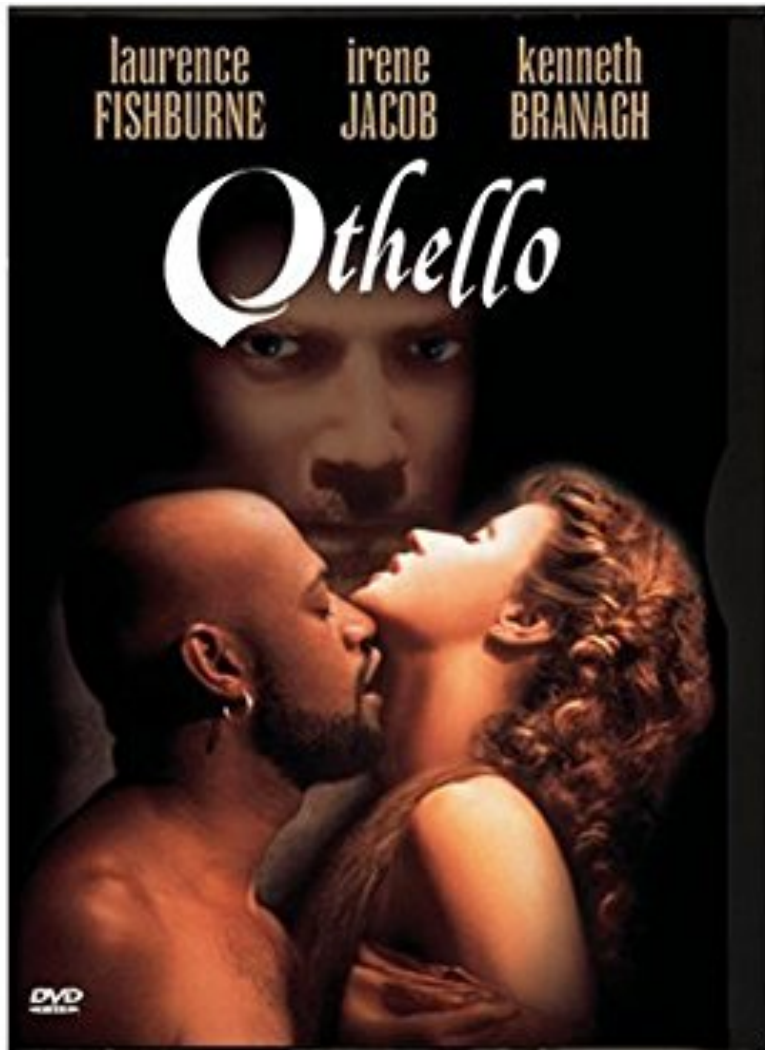


Figure 178. Laurence Fishburne as Othello, 1995. Director Oliver Parker.



Figure 179. Michael Abberley, Royal Doulton Toby Othello Mug, The Shakespearean Collection, c. 1982-89.



Figure 180. Raymond Weil's Othello Watch. Released as "a blend of avant-garde technology and refined design with its ultra-thin timepieces and created 1986 to celebrate Raymond Weil's tenth anniversary." Text and image extracted from <https://www.raymond-weil.us/history/>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 181. Othello Board Game, adapted by Japanese Goro Hasegawa, in 1971, from original game Reversi. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reversi>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 182. Sam S. Shubert Theatre Playbill, Paul Robeson as Othello, 1944.



Figure 183. Iqbal Khan, Poster of Royal Shakespeare Company's *Othello*, 2015. Starring Hugh Quarshie. <http://www.rscprints.org.uk/art/720392/othello-2015>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 184. John William Gear (1806-1866), *Edmund Kean as Othello*, early 19th Century. National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 185. William Worthen Appleton, Mr. Macready as Othello, n/d. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed February 14, 2018. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-ed18-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 186. Russian actor Constantin Stanislavski as Othello in 1896. Photograph Courtesy Dictionary of Theatre/Public Domain.



Figure 187. Sir John Gielgud (1904-2000), Playing the Role of Othello at The Royal Shakespeare Theatre In Statford-Upon-Avon, England, October 11, 1961. The author first watched RST's *Othello* this same year. Photograph by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images.



Figure 188. Laurence Olivier wore blackface when he portrayed Othello in the 1965's film version. Getty Images/Montage by the Huffington Post.com, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 189. From left, Rokia Traoré, Tina Benko (lying down), Bintou Soumbounou, Fatim Kouyate and Kadiatou Sangare in *Desdemona*, written by Toni Morrison and with music by Ms. Traoré. Photograph by Pascal Victo/ArtComArt, The New York Times.com, accessed December, 2017.

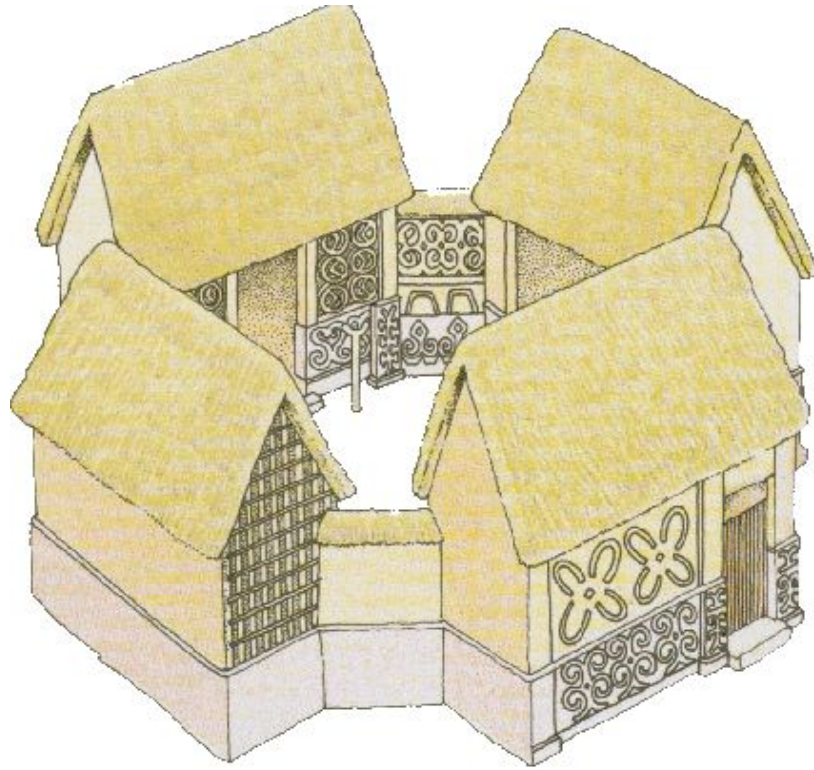


Figure 190. Illustration showing a traditional home of an Asante King. Skyscrapercity.com <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1687307&langid=6>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 191. Unknown artist, (Côte d'Ivoire, Baule), Leopard stool (royal seat), 20th century. Philadelphia Museum of Art. <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/107532.html>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 192. Common Kente Cloth pattern.

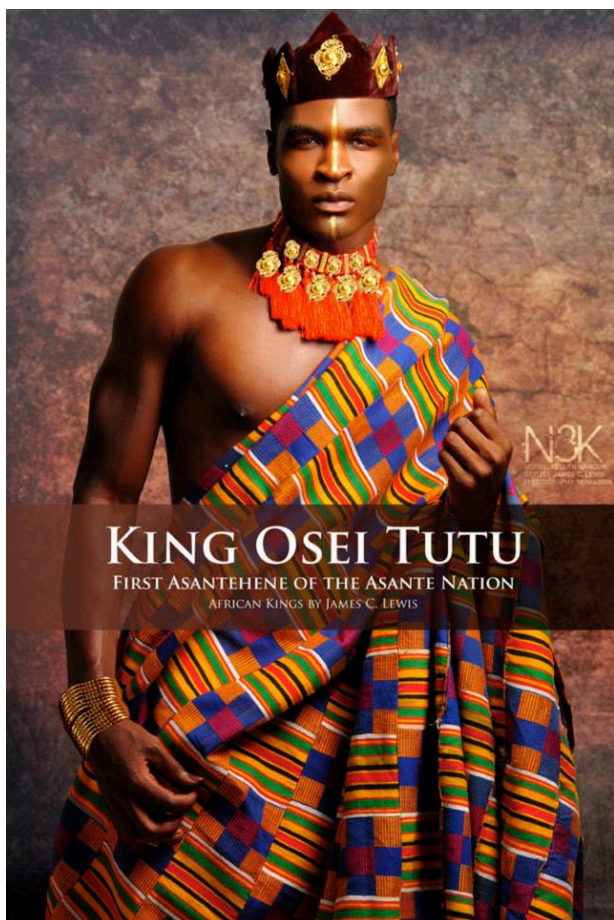


Figure 193. James C. Lewis, *King Osei Tutu*, n/d. *Photographic series*. Noire3000 | N3k Photo Studios. <http://www.noire3000studios.com>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 194. Unknown author, *Portrait of Virginia Woolf*, 1927. Courtesy of the Harvard Theater Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.



Figure 195. Man weaving Kente cloth in bonwire in a weaving village near Kumasi. Photograph by Nyani Quarmyne. <https://www.projectbly.com/destinations/kumasi/meet>, accessed December, 2017.



Figure 196. Shakespeare on the wall, Ghana, 2010. Photograph by the author.

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doi:10.1093/alh/6.3.559.
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