


Introduction

 With rising levels of anti-U.S. sentiment around the world, it's imperative that Americans concern themselves about the future, particularly given our shaky prospects for success in the so-called "War On Terror." We haven't been able to win the Wars on Poverty, Drugs or Crime, so it seems reasonable to be skeptical about our prospects for winning this latest war, especially with the debacles of leadership exhibited in Washington. The growing hatred of America cannot remain unaddressed indefinitely without consequence. It must either reach an ugly, foreseeable end or, less likely, be corrected to see America reach new heights of world dominance. In any event, the process of transformation cannot begin without a sobering, wholesale examination of the problem, in terms of its origins and what's causing it to fester and grow, as if there's some mystery about it.

The U.S.'s misguided invasion and occupation of Iraq makes many believe a mere change of the political administration is the simple cure. But if we remember the terrorist attacks going as far back as the killing of American servicemen in Beirut, Lebanon during the Reagan administration, or even the taking of hostages in Iran during the democratic administration of Jimmy Carter, in 1979, we can see the problem has been festering for at least a generation or more. In fact, I

would argue the demise of American respect and credibility formally began at the time of the failed campaign in Vietnam, which necessarily carried a degree of lost respect for our supposed military invincibility, and only further reinforced by the “Shock and Awe” of our effort in Iraq, the shocking part being the sheer accuracy of Osama Bin Laden’s characterization of the U.S. as a “paper tiger.”

But I happen to believe America’s declining command of world respect even has much deeper roots, and has only crystallized in this Age of Information where perfect knowledge is seemingly absolute, because of our open borders, the availability of transportation, satellite technology, the internet, etc. The informal roots of this new “American Dilemma,” as I see it, must be at least, if not wholly, related to the dilemma traditionally identified with this country, most prominently in the nineteenth century by the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, and in the twentieth century by the American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, and the European Gunnar Myrdal, and symbolized by the recent tragedies experienced in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, which showed, still, the limited economic acceptance and participation by Black slave descendents in America, screaming out the continued need for equality of opportunity and rights. Whether the largely avoidable, disastrous results were indifferently mishandled out of racist motives or not is irrelevant. The fact is, the tragedy highlighted the embarrassing problem that has existed since the beginning of this, the world’s richest democracy: racial inequality.

Although we have traditionally promoted ourselves around the world as a country without class distinctions, where everyone is truly free and equal, that is something we are not and never have been, at least with regard to the country’s native Black population. As a descendent of Black American slaves, I find myself constantly bumping into compromising race issues in my daily life, whether in a professional, social, political, educational, economic or civic environment, yet faced with the expectation and pressure to accept the norm that in this country Black is, still, second-class, less than, and subordinate to White. I’ve come to a place where I now find this increasingly difficult to do, because as someone old enough to remember some of the Civil Rights battles of the Sixties, I understood that, certainly by the twenty-first century, America would be a very different country. To be sure, there has been definite progress from the era of legally segregated public accommodations. But due largely to entrenched stereotypes, and the legacy of Black slavery, the reality is, America still has not fully closed the gap.

Because America’s resistance to full racial equality has persisted, I believe it has seeped into our dealings with the outside world, where

many countries feel the U.S. does not deal with them as equals but with a condescending arrogance that is off-putting. For that reason, America cannot repair its image abroad without a serious look at its problems at home, particularly with regard to race and the acceptance of diverse communities as equal, viable parts of the whole of the country, rather than as mere appendages to the mainstream. A major part of that introspection, should necessarily include an accounting of the past. As such, a major component of forcing the world community to take notice of American desire to repair its image in a genuine way should, I think, begin with making reparations for past injustices, specifically for Black slavery. By highlighting issues of America's history of slavery and its legacies, this book seeks to contribute to a national dialogue that will be a positive stimulus to that end.

Wondering where it all started and how it came to this, as America proclaims equality for all people, inevitably led me to search independently for answers in the nation's yet unaddressed history of African slavery. The study of that history led me to a different understanding altogether of how the institution affects the lives of Americans today, through its legacy of economics and race, and to find seriously misplaced accountability with regard to what, and how, America came to be.

Namely, like it or not, slavery was a crucial part of this country's economic growth and development, without which America could not claim any semblance of the preeminent position it occupies in today's world order. Yet, not without good reason, we look upon slavery with curiosity, shame, disgust and regret. As a consequence, in my opinion, Reparations are singularly crucial to allowing America to honorably put a period behind that institution, and to change the face of shame to one of ownership and pride. We are now a full-grown nation. It's time to stop pretending slavery didn't happen, or was simply an isolated episode of misfortune in American history, and instead acknowledge its cornerstone contribution to the America we know today — on par with the Founding Fathers.

I have always felt an emotional and spiritual connection to America's African slaves and, although somewhat fearful, have even as a child been curious about their history and lives, possibly because my foster father in Philadelphia, Arthur "Papa" Deas, born 1909, who migrated from South Carolina after World War II, knew his grandfather and great grandfather, both of whom had been born slaves, part of the prominent, slave-owning Deas family of South

Carolina (see slave sale broadside, next page). “Papa” Deas, didn’t generally talk much, but when old-time family or acquaintances from the South visited there were occasional references to fascinating memories and stories of old slavery customs and experiences handed down to them through the generations. These “old folks” thought their stories were amusing, but it was nevertheless clear the sometimes-chilling truth was in reality no laughing matter. Though I was curious, the thought of asking questions or broaching conversation on the subject was never a realistic possibility, not without risking a serious thrashing afterwards, that is. In the early 1970s, children were supposed to be seen and not heard whenever “cump’nee” came by. Still, I’ve always known that someday I would have to understand what it all meant. My motivation for this project therefore came in no small part from a curiosity about the truth and the facts. I find it astonishing that such an important aspect of America is virtually ignored in the general history taught in grade schools. What I’ve learned, however, has helped me understand myself, and my family, in a way that I would not have otherwise. In that sense this has been the most fulfilling thing I have ever done, and, perhaps, ever will do.

During this process of truth seeking, admittedly at times somewhat cynically, I forcefully challenge accepted conventions of what American slavery was and what it meant to this country and the world, as well as what has not been said. As a result, the book will likely be received, or dismissed, largely as polemic. However, I believe a successfully persuasive argument lies not only in the strength of positive promotion, but also in the strength of its rebuttal arguments.

In reading about America’s history I identified a widespread interest in altering slavery’s unpleasant truth to conform to what seemed a much more palatable un-truth. Slaves are no longer around to speak for themselves, so I found it difficult to ignore or accept what I saw as attempts to interpret slavery independent of the narratives and recordings they left behind, particularly given the fact that those interpretations affect the quality of Black life today, and will continue to do so long into the future.

It is not my intention to offend, but rather to be truthful and accurate about the facts as I see them, though I’ve been questioned as to whether there exists a single, universal truth regarding slavery, a reference to the many inferences that might be drawn from a particular set of facts. Although, really, there can be only one set of facts. My goals are primarily to distinguish these facts from mere wishful thinking and romanticism, with regard to both the history and the legacy.

I am, however, sensible that the facts regarding slavery are themselves often unpleasant or offensive, particularly when it comes to issues of race. I found it difficult, if not impossible, though, to analyze the many truths of slavery or its legacies without relating much that is unpleasant and distasteful, because slavery was not a nice institution. Moreover, the resulting legacies Blacks have to live with are, for the most part, anything but nice. Those sufficiently tired of revisiting slavery's uncomfortable truths, or more Black perspectives on American racism, particularly from a polemic perspective, should not read on.

But in recognition of slavery as the only connection of African Americans to a sense belonging in this examination is For example, when I Boston's famous landmarks, I feel the any significant Black city's history, aside lived here,' or, 'that there,' are subordinated to the contributions of the as Boylston, Faneuil, therefore feel no the city and certainly or belonging, which, intended effect.



1769 slave sale by the Deas family of S. Carolina.

of ownership and country, a frank nonetheless critical. move around streets and historical precious few signs of contribution to the from, 'this individual event happened conspicuously celebrated city's founders, such Adams, etc. I

personal connection to no sense of ownership no doubt, is the

However, after learning Peter Faneuil, of Boston's famed Faneuil Hall, and Thomas Boylston, namesake of the city's prominent Boylston Street, were shipping merchants engaging the African slave trade; or that historic Harvard University, Massachusetts General Hospital and Boston Symphony Orchestra were all, in fact, the largest philanthropic beneficiaries of the profits harvested from the backs of Black slaves, I suddenly have a very different feeling about the city (though I'm more galled at the insultingly low enrollment of native born Black Americans at Harvard). Since the blood of slaves contributed to the fame of its namesake, and not only made an important contribution but, in fact, potentially the most important one — the ultimate contribution, I now strangely feel I belong in Faneuil Hall as much as anyone.

In truth, the very same reality applies to almost every city in America, where institutions and monuments of supposed White genius and industry more appropriately symbolize the inhumanity and depravity of their namesakes. In New York City, for example, the fabled Astors and Tiffany's, for starters, built fortunes gleaned from slavery profits, and in Philadelphia the extensive Wharton and Girard fortunes, among many others, were similarly anchored in the misery and death of Black slaves. I find this subordinated significance of Black slavery in America's brief history, in favor of White supremacy, deeply troubling. Much has been written yet there is still much to be understood, in terms of slavery's history and its legacies. This is an attempt to further uncover these truths

I broach no specific definitions of the terms used, believing the generally understood meanings, even with minor variations, will suffice. Except, that is, with regard to use of the term "White supremacy," because of differing intellectual and emotional connotations understood between many Blacks and Whites. My application of the term is not limited to the extreme, violent factions generally associated with it by many White Americans. Any promotion of the superiority of Whites or, alternatively, the inferiority of Blacks, in any way, consciously or subconsciously, be it of values, intelligence, morals or work ethic, including everyday racism and discrimination, is a belief in the supremacy of the White race and therefore falls within the definition of White supremacy as I use and understand it.