

THE ANTI RACISM MOVEMENT - PART ONE

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Europeans, specifically Portuguese, were among the first to traffic enslaved Africans to Lisbon, Lagos and Seville between the 1440s and the 1500s. Before the plantation systems took shape, enslaved Africans were forced to work as domestic servants, labourers in the fields of southern Portugal, and also in the copper mines. Then, in the late 15th century, Europeans used the Atlantic islands as a lab to perfect their large-scale monoculture plantation model using forced labour, exporting to the Caribbean and Brazil.

Historians have dubbed Europe to be the command centre of the 'Triangular Trade' - a self-sustaining economic system that led to rapid industrial growth. Ships departed ports laden with goods like firearms, and were traded on the African coast for human 'slaves' who were subjected to brutal conditions during transit to the Americas. In the end, the vessels returned to Europe, filled with slave-grown products like sugar, cotton, etc., fueling refineries and mills to keep the wave of industrial wealth intact.

On the one hand, Europe had nations that accumulated immense colonial wealth through slavery, and on the other, they upheld a 'Free Soil' principle within their domestic borders. In the 1772 *Somerset v Stewart* case in England, Lord Mansfield famously declared the nation's air "too pure for a slave to breathe" to ensure an enslaved human was not forcefully removed to be sold in the colonies. In the same vein, France's 'Freedom Principle' liberated any enslaved human who set foot in French soil, only to reclassify them as 'servants' in training. The contradictions that stemmed from such language pointed towards the acute dependency Europe had on human trafficking and the slave trade.

A leading slavery abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson, famously carried a chest of several instruments of torture - handcuffs, branding irons, shackles - to bring to light the reality of the colonial system. Years later, the 1794 French decree of the National Convention to abolish slavery was the result of a Haitian revolution carried out by men and women demanding freedom from the horror of slavery. While it set off some legal precedents and a formal end of colonial control, the reality is that Europe continues to rely on labour that's racialised, even in the post-colonial 'modern' era.

Modern-Day Racialised Underclass

In modern times, the 'colour' of the workforce continues to remain an acute indicator of class position despite years of advocacy against the erstwhile slave trade and racism. Even today, non-EU-born residents are consistently overemployed in 'elementary occupations'. In countries like Italy and Spain, the agriculture sector, which is the backbone of food distribution, is heavily reliant on migrant labour from Africa and South Asia.





Reports suggest that many of these workers live in 'ghetto' type informal settlements without running water or electricity, earning below minimum wage. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics confirm that Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British workers are significantly more likely to be employed in 'gig economy' jobs with zero-hour contracts, when compared to the whites. While modernised externally, European society retains several of its methods of exploitation rather than eradication. Where 'inclusion' is a mere corporate term that shadows this racial segregation.

The Specific Violation of Women

A true test for a movement claiming to be against discrimination is by the way they include female experiences in its analysis. The legacy of years of colonial 'othering' continues to remain a permanent fixture in the treatment of racialised women - the way they are viewed by the public or consumed through media. And pornography serves as a primary carrier to further the colonial, racist tropes. Feminist and author Dr Gail Dines argues that pornography is a mass-marketing tool to uphold white supremacy. The industry is built on a racialised script that disallows women of colour to be viewed not as individual human beings, but mere archetypes of post-colonial fantasy. It especially categorises women of colour using aggressive colonial tropes like 'Jezebel' for Black women or the 'submissive lotus flower' for Asian women. These are tools under the veneer of 'preferences' that psychologically instruct men to look at racialised women as less deserving of boundaries, and readily 'available'. Dines reinforces the dangers of eroticising such degradation; the pornography industry manufactures a feedback loop. Whereby men who consume visuals of racialised women being abused on screen as 'entertainment', they create a society where real-world violation of such women would seem like a no-holds-barred outlet for male aggression.

Along the same lines, these digital degradations pave the way for material consequences in the real world. Dr Melissa Farley's extensive research in several European countries suggests that race and class are funnels into prostitution. Farley points out the 'racist empathy gap' in the system where racialised migrant women's plight in 'legal' countries like Germany and the Netherlands is dismissed as 'part of the job.' What the exploitative model calls 'choice' or 'work' is a direct result of colonial coercion. In a paper she co-wrote with Rachel Moran, they write, "Prostitution exists because of the male demand for it, and racial and economic inequalities render women vulnerable to it. This means that prostitution is produced from an entwinement of sex, race, and economic inequalities." Both Dines and Farley's research proves how the 'sex' industry epitomises racism, and implies a colonial idea that some lives are worth less than others, and some bodies are okay to be raped, tortured and violated.

Erasure of Sex - The Ultimate Colonial Card

As if the crisis faced by women wasn't bad enough, a colonial tool of oppression has gone the 'woke' way to further the damage. The symbolic 'inclusion' in the case of ensuring women of colour are part of the workforce has turned into including men who claim to be women instead. Not only does this undermine the material reality of women's lives, but the practice of using words like 'womxn' or the insistence on the prefix 'cis' to describe females suggests that we are now a subcategory in our own sex class.

The circular argument by activists, "trans women are women", is often made up to be a civil rights baseline, yet it compares a male to women of colour. **To suggest a biological man's experience of 'gender' is a category of womanhood similar to being a Black woman is profoundly racist and misogynistic.**

Black womanhood comes with a history of racist, enslaved, reproductive and sexual exploitation that is tied to our biological sex. Drawing comparisons to these two suggests the centuries of hardships and brutal violence faced by Black women are just a broader feeling-based 'identity'.

The active push towards eliminating sex-segregated spaces like domestic violence shelters, prisons, etc., is defended using the language of anti-racism, too. They claim that excluding men from female-only spaces is as harsh as the racial segregation of the past. Such a comparison, while profoundly racist, also ignores every measure we've tried to create to protect women from the universal reality of male violence, whereas racial segregation was to uphold white supremacy. Citing Jim Crow or the Apartheid to justify the removal of such provisions further entrenches appropriation of racially motivated trauma to serve men's political agenda.

Towards a More Tangible Model of Anti-Racism

Beyond symbolic inclusion, the anti-racism movement must move away from linguistic etiquette endorsed by neoliberal activists, towards a more tangible model. Feminists have long argued that systems like the sex trade formalise subordination. And when the state rebrands a disproportionate funnelling of racialised women into the system as 'choice' or 'sex work' it undoes all strides taken against the colonial slave trade. This is them creating a permanent 'lower' class of women who could be enslaved for 'pleasure' and violated, just as the colonial hierarchies of the past.

True anti-racism warrants an uncompromising approach towards structural culpability, forcing the entire system to atone for this historic wrong. It warrants a water-tight understanding of the entanglement of race, class and sex inequality that can't be overlooked by merely changing a vowel, or adding pronouns in signatures. Until such a rigorous momentum is achieved, anti-racism would merely be paying lip service to cater to the interests of the powerful and ensure the colonial status quo remains unblemished.