



RACISM AS NONSENSICAL AS CREATIONISM

Recent events in Ferguson, Missouri and elsewhere clearly show that race relations in the United States remains a serious problem. It is, as well, a legacy of slavery in our nation. But there is a larger story not widely known or appreciated.

Slavery is a very old practice. But when the American colonies were established, it had not been practiced in Britain for centuries. But as labor was needed, bond servitude, of Europeans at first, joined later by Africans under various contractual arrangements, was used. But "true slavery did not exist in the early decades of the English North American colonies ... [although] some men who purchased headrights to laborers treated them as if they were slaves for life," according to renowned anthropologist Audrey Smedley, who is herself of African ancestry. In those early days, blacks and whites lived together, worked together and intermarried. There was no pervasive identification of dark skin with either servitude or inferiority. That began to change after a series of rebellions by the lower classes, especially Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. The best historical evidence, Smedley notes, is that the British:

"began to pass laws, very gradually ... that gave Europeans privileges while they increasingly enslaved Africans. ... There was a decline in the number of European servants ... [and] an increase in the ships bringing Africans ... the Europeans become identified as 'white.' And Africans ... are not only heathens, but ... perceived as vulnerable to being enslaved. ... it became part of the consciousness that they had no rights as Englishmen. ... between 1690 and 1735, even those Africans who had been free and who had been there for many generations, had their rights taken away from them. ... [and] it was possible to create a society in which the slaves were little better than animals. ... After a while, slavery became identified with Africans. ... [it] gave people the idea that Africans were a different kind of people. ... [whereas] the early 17th century planter ... wrote to the trustees of his company and he said: 'Please don't send us any more Irishmen. Send us some Africans, because the Africans are civilized and the Irish are not.' But 100 years later, ... all the attributes of savagery which the English had once given to the Irish, now they are giving to the Africans." [1]

In the late 18th Century, Thomas Jefferson, considering the idea that African slaves had an inferior moral sense, pointed out:

"That a change in the relations in which a man is placed should change his ideas of moral right and wrong, is neither new, nor peculiar to the colour of the blacks. ... The opinion, that they are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence." [2]

Jefferson, a slaveowner himself, nevertheless went along with popular beliefs, saying:

"I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior ..."

But Jefferson also suggested that these questions were "subjects of natural history" – the term by which science was then known – to be settled by recourse to facts and reason. The trouble was that the scientific methods of the time could not – and did not – settle such questions properly. Instead, learned men gave credence to the idea that there really were separate "races" of humanity. Biblical grounds were also advanced for this belief. The great Harvard professor of zoology and geology Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), famous for his opposition to Darwin's ideas, held that blacks and whites were actually different species. [3]

The late 19th and early 20th Century has been called "the golden age of racial classification." [3] In 1934 one influential German anthropologist divided humanity into three subspecies, 38 varieties and 37 subvarieties. Even the embrace of Hitler and Nazism did not much weaken the standing of this idea. But in 1950, UNESCO issued a statement on "The Race Question," saying:

"the problem of race ... has its roots 'in the minds of men.' ... It involves belief in the innate and absolute superiority of an arbitrarily defined human group over other equally arbitrarily defined groups ... maintained in defiance of the scientific method ... all men belong to the same species ... each group arbitrarily tends to misinterpret the variability which occurs as a fundamental difference ... National, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups: and the

cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated genetic connection with racial traits. ... it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of ethnic groups. ... 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth."

Unfortunately, UNESCO revised this statement the following year, saying:

"The physical anthropologists and the man in the street both know that races exist; the former, from the scientifically recognisable and measurable congeries of traits which he uses in classifying the varieties of man; the latter from the immediate evidence of his senses ..."

But by the 1960's serious scientific debate was underway. Beginning in the 1970's, new technologies for sequencing DNA set the stage for the final crumbling of the idea of "race." In 2000, when the first draft of the Human Genome Project was announced, Craig Venter pointed out that the results showed definitively "that the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis." Meanwhile, skin color, the chief feature of "race," was found to be nothing more than an adaptation to ground-level UV exposure. (discussed at the February NTCOF service and see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOSPNVunyFQ>)

Why, then, do "race" relations problems persist? How can there even be such difficulties when the concept of "race" has no basis in fact? The answer can only be that the facts are not yet widely known or have not been understood. "Racism" is as factually bankrupt as geocentrism or creationism. But like creationism and other nonsense, the idea of race is still getting into and persisting in people's heads where it works its harm. And this is where the problem must be met.

As important as it is to spread awareness about the dangers of distracted and drunk driving, of "your brain on drugs," the prevention of forest fires and of crime, and the ugliness of litter and pollution, it is even more important to make the facts known about the fallacy of "race." Too many people – of all skin colors and ethnicities – have already paid - and are paying - too much because of this mistaken idea. But the truth cannot set anyone free when the truth is not widely known and understood. It is time to get the truth out, to trumpet it in the media and discuss it among ourselves, to teach it to our children and to fight its contrary wherever it is met.

Yes, people will find other "reasons" to hate each other. And it may take a generation or two to obliterate the nonsense of racism and repair the damage it has done. But we must start now to do this. It is too important a task to neglect. And, it is a moral obligation. [references on request]

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:
- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. It happens most non-1st Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Freethought Book Club: To Be Announced!

Communitas Dinner Groups: To Be Announced!

Have Another Idea? Email or call us about it!

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
 "FAMILY VALUES"
 (and/or other stuff)**

**>> Sunday, May 3rd, 2015 <<
 >still at our NEW LOCATION<
 COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
 (about 1/2 mile west of the Sheraton on 114
 - take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the
 frontage road east just past Best Western)**

**YOUR GENEROUS
 DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF
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 AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

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