

## Editors' welcome

We are thrilled to introduce you to the Queen Mary History Journal's very first exclusively online publication! We want to start off by thanking everyone who submitted an essay to be considered for this issue; the editorial team have had a tough task in selecting only five essays from the many we received, and have been thoroughly impressed by the calibre of work submitted. The quality of work we have received has unfortunately meant that some fantastic essays have not been selected for this issue. However, we hope that students will continue to submit essays for the many issues we have coming up.

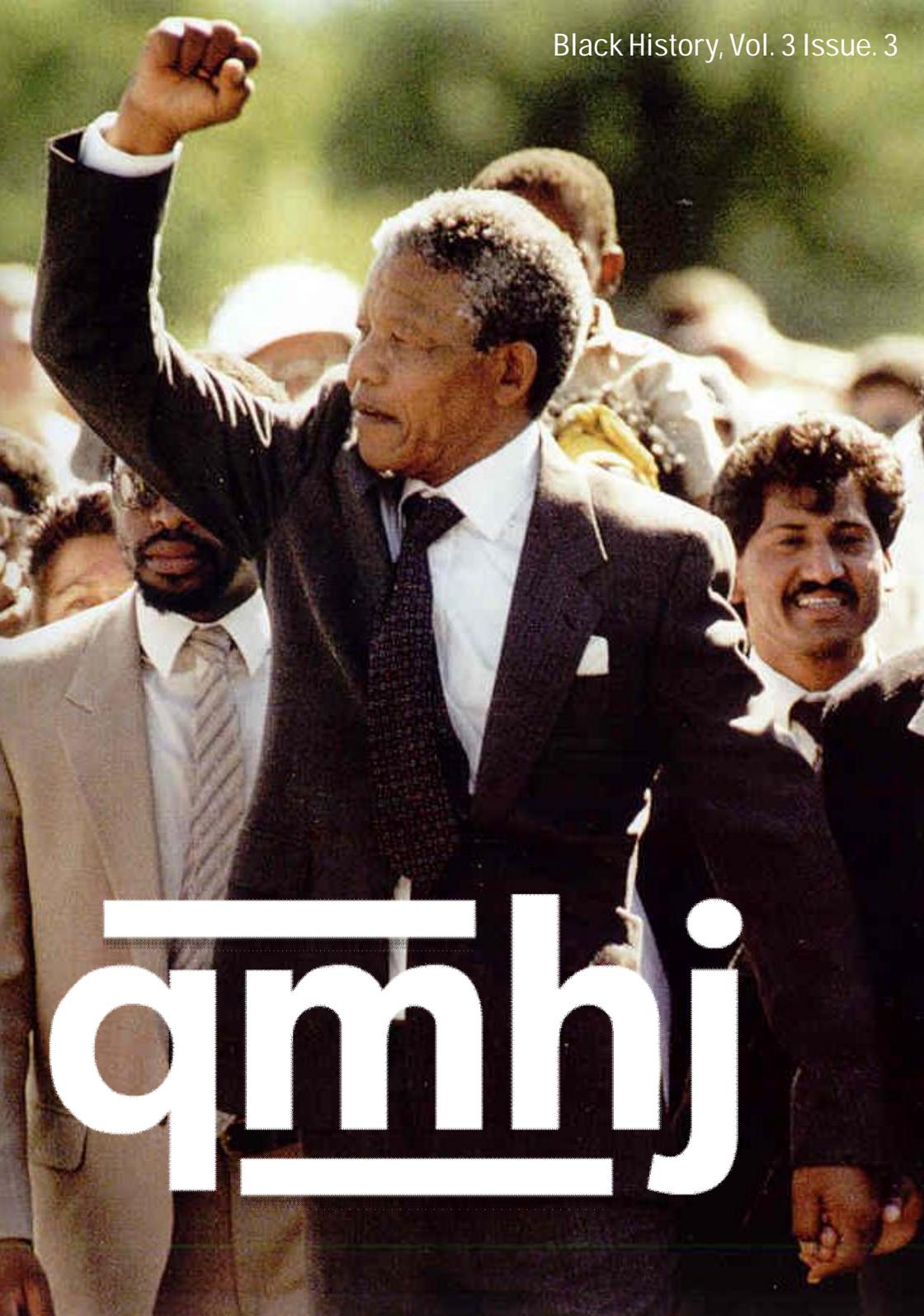
This year looks set to be the most exciting year yet for the History Journal as we move away from our previous format of two printed journals per year into uncharted territory, adding both regular monthly online editions and a blog. In doing so, we hope to make the Journal accessible to as many students as possible, and we encourage you all to get involved by submitting essays and blog posts.

We hope that you continue to follow the Journal throughout the year, and we look forward to seeing you all at one of our events. Our first follows the theme of Black History. The speakers are Dr Reuben Loffman and Dr Miranda Kaufmann.

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Sam Winton & Ruth Irwin

Editor-in-Chief & Commissioning-editor



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## How did Mandela's early life affect his subsequent development?

*Camilla Kidd*

*'It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul'*. Instilled in Nelson Mandela from his missionary school days, W .E Henley's *Invictus* became particularly poignant to Mandela during his time in Robben Island.<sup>1</sup> He was said to have recited it, universalising his life experiences through his readings.<sup>2</sup> It is often a common view that Mandela was simply destined for greatness from birth, however, this essay will aim to unpick this theory and examine how Mandela took aspects from each part of his early life and argue that that is what made him the man the world knows of today. To do this, his early life will be split into three stages; firstly looking at his family life in the Transkei and examining his 'royal' connections, secondly looking at his schooling and finally his experiences at Fort Hare. However, before doing this, it is necessary to address the issues that arise from using biographies primarily as a source.

Many biographers feed into the 'Mandela Myth'. Elleke Boehmer suggests that all the standard biographies take a similar generic path of a 'ready-made journey motif'.<sup>3</sup> Boehmer's book *Nelson Mandela; A Very Short Introduction* is critical of the

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narrative that biographers such as Fatima Meer, Antony Sampson and David Meredith have played into. There is also the question of whether Mandela himself has added to this myth. In his autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom* he exemplifies the 'onward and upwards trajectory' that Boemher again addresses.<sup>4</sup> Claiming that the type of narrative was a common theme that can be seen throughout the coming of age stories of Africans, including those of Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and Albert Luthuli, Mandela is simply following this pattern. Since many of the biographies have been written based on Mandela's, it can be said that he is responsible for creating, at least part of the myth that surrounds his persona.

It is important to note the context to which Mandela grew up in; that is, until he reached Johannesburg he had managed to avoid the notion of being racially inferior.<sup>5</sup> Despite the white mission teachers on their 'civilising mission' he had never faced serious racial prejudices. He lived in, effectively, a black world. The fact that since he has come to the media's attention, he has been judged as a black man in what was then seen as a white racially superior country; Boemher states that he was never subject of derogatory white eyes and that he lived in a world where, if one worked hard rewards would be given, be it 'worldly or spiritual'.<sup>6</sup> Does this too play into the Mandela myth? Was his autobiography written to tell the white men of his struggle against their oppression or to tell black men that they can rise above the prejudice? It would appear that he appeals to both.

But the main thing that is taken away is how much his early life has affected his subsequent development. In this, Mandela attempts to paint himself as a man of the people, from his humble upbringings in the Transkei with the notion of working hard for something. This can, undeniably, be seen as a pattern throughout his later life in his willingness to die for his cause.

The earliest stages of his life were greatly influenced by his homeland and subsequently his genealogy. Mary Benson, in her biography of Mandela suggests that it was in the fertile grounds of the Transkei that his love for his country and his people took root, linking his native homeland with his political cause.<sup>7</sup> At the start of David Meredith's biography of Mandela, one of the first things he notes is his royal connection, stating that despite only descending from a minor branch of the dynasty 'his link with the Thembu royal family was to have a marked influence on both his character and his fortunes'.<sup>8</sup> Meredith is far from the only biographer to mention this link. This royal connection would be the deciding factor in his trajectory toward becoming the figure he is today. Despite much disagreement, it seems hard to deny that without the royal connection and being handed to Chief Jongintaba after his father's death, he may not have had a chance to progress in his education. Subsequent paragraphs will argue that this got him to the peak of his career. Tom Lodge, in his book, *Mandela; A Critical Life*, suggests that this is not all he got from his genealogy; he says it is also the key to his charisma.<sup>9</sup> The idea of 'roots were destiny' would stick with him throughout his life until later when he was able to take a step back and look at it

more critically.<sup>10</sup>

Mandela's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, was wealthy enough to own four wives, fathering thirteen children, of which Mandela was the youngest boy. As a father figure, he was very influential in Mandela's early childhood. Even without his royal connections, in his autobiography when talking about his father, Mandela claims he was a very good orator. Despite the fact he could not read or write he had the ability to captivate his audiences, by entertaining as well as teaching.<sup>11</sup> This is a trait that he clearly passed down to his son, linking back to Lodge's idea of his charisma coming from his genealogy. Furthermore, Mandela goes on to say that his father possessed a proud rebelliousness and sense of fairness that he can see in himself.<sup>12</sup>

Mandela's mother too was very influential in her son's relationship with women; he says his mother was the centre of his world.<sup>13</sup> Meredith talks of Mandela's at ease personality around women, commenting that he felt comfortable and that he was able to admit his weaknesses to women as he was unable to do with men.<sup>14</sup> After his father's death when they moved to Qunu, Mandela was surrounded by mainly women; the men of the village were away for most of the year working on farms. Since his childhood was filled with close family and friends, whilst on Robben Island he was wracked with guilt, by the fact that he had split his family up, and upon his release tried to rebuild a close connection. This centrality of family seems to have stemmed from the long Thembu traditional view of having a very large family support system.<sup>15</sup>

After land disputes with the British, Gadla was stripped of his title and his wealth; David James Smith in *Young Mandela*, suggests that this was the defining moment in Mandela's life.<sup>16</sup> However, Meredith argues that it was in 1929 with the death of his father that was the key life changing event. Mandela himself states in his autobiography, 'my father's passing changed my whole life in a way that I did not suspect at the time'.<sup>17</sup> His mother was unable to pay for his school fees, but due to his royal connections Mandela was taken under the wing of Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo; the acting regent of the Thembu people.<sup>18</sup> This is the point at which it can be argued that his royal connections had in some way privileged him. If Jongintaba did not help him further his education, Mandela's life could have played out very differently.

Mandela's life changed dramatically upon taking residence at the Great Palace with Chief Jongintaba. Meredith put forward the idea that Mandela 'absorbed' the chiefly ways of Jongintaba. At tribal meetings he would let everyone talk and absorb what they were saying, and once it came time to close the meeting Jongintaba would make a statement and attempt to find a consensus of views. Mandela himself also makes this connection and says that his own notions of leadership were 'substantially shaped by what he observed as a child in the Great Palace'.<sup>19</sup> This is what Mandela himself draws upon in the African National Congress (ANC). One particular strand where this can be seen in is the tolerance of communism and Indians, finding a common political stance that all the different

groups could agree upon.

Mandela's awareness of African nationalism became apparent during the lessons given to him at Jongintaba's Great Palace. It was here that he started to take an interest in African history. Before he had only heard Xhosa history, much of Africa's local history being transmitted orally at this time, particularly in rural contexts; Jongintaba opened his eyes to other African heroes.<sup>20</sup> Another lesson Mandela claims to have learnt from the chief was 'a highly developed sense of dignity' and from a young age Mandela learnt that to humiliate another person, was to make him suffer an unnecessary cruel fate, stating 'even as a boy, I learnt to defeat my opponents without dishonouring them'.<sup>21</sup> This once again is a technique that can be seen throughout his political career.

Two institutions that ruled Mandela's life at the Great Palace were chieftaincy and the church.<sup>22</sup> Lodge states, when talking about Jongintaba preparing him for chieftaincy, that Mandela decided then that he never wanted to rule over oppressed peoples.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly significant to his later political life as he based much of his ideal of a democratic South Africa on this principle. The church was said to be something that had a great influence on his development throughout his life. The church was another very influential place for Mandela, he was a student at Clarkesbury mission, where he first encountered a notable British bias in his education- only being taught English, Xhosa, History and Geography – the missionaries had a strong belief in the virtues of the British empire and their civilising mission.<sup>24</sup> Despite Mandela disliking their motives behind the education he was given, he nonetheless took in what they taught

him at the school. When on Robben Island he would recite Macaulay's lines on Horatius to honour his fallen comrades.<sup>25</sup>

Upon Arrival at Clarkesbury, Mandela suggested himself, that he was somewhat stuck up. However, the teachers at the mission school treated him exactly like every other student, which he said had probably been a good lesson.<sup>26</sup> Far from his royal connections, he was seen as somewhat of a 'Yokel country boy who could barely walk in his new shoes'.<sup>27</sup> Smith says that the mission school allowed Mandela to mix with many different people from across South Africa, but counteracts what Mandela says and claims he "still saw himself as part of an elite tribe, the Thembu".<sup>28</sup> From his missionary schooling it would seem that this was a period of his life when he was learning to embrace not only the new English culture being pushed on them, but also to embrace other African tribes. Although Clarkesbury "broadened his horizons" he claims he did not leave a totally open minded individual.<sup>29</sup>

Mandela later moved onto Healdtown, once referred to as 'a little slice of England'<sup>30</sup> where he was taught to believe "the best ideas were British ideas, the best government was the British Government and the best men were Englishmen". In this period of his life Mandela was being bombarded by British values and morals, by people very much under the British Empire mentality and this seemed to have a profound effect on him. He himself said that he has much respect for the British

government and that his image of a gentleman conjures up images of the English gentlemen. This idea goes hand in hand with the notion that he was always respectful of authority.<sup>31</sup> This goes even further back to him being taught to respect his elders by his family. The propaganda bombardment of the British Empire was strongly counteracted by the Xhosa writer Samuel Mqhayi, a man who felt very passionately about the way African history was being taught. He gave, upon his visit to Healdtown, a speech about the curse of foreign culture and how the strength of African culture would eventually rise up and overcome this.<sup>32</sup> This event was described by Mandela as like "a comet streaking across the sky".<sup>33</sup>

Samuel Mqhayi was one of two people that had a major effect on Mandela's ideological views, the other being Chief Meligqili, Jongintaba's brother, who gave a speech at Mandela's circumcision. This speech condemned foreign presence in South Africa, yet it failed to acknowledge the value of education and the benefits that the whites had brought to their country.<sup>34</sup> Lodge talks of Mandela, after this speech, feeling 'galvanized and confused'.<sup>35</sup>

Fort Hare at the time was a ground breaking institution, graduating from there almost guaranteed one access into any job open to blacks in South Africa, so for Mandela to gain entry was a huge achievement in itself.<sup>36</sup> In his first year at Fort Hare he studied English, anthropology, politics, native administration and Roman Law.<sup>37</sup> When looking at his life on Robben Island, there are numerous accounts of him teaching other prisoners about politics and hence the idea emerged that the island was

a 'university' within itself. Fort Hare also set him up for life after prison, in that it in some ways westernised him. It was here that he learnt more about western culture such as sleeping in pyjamas and brushing his teeth with toothpaste and not ash; he also took part in ballroom dancing and several different sports.<sup>38</sup>

'With the university being such an important black elite establishment, many of the future black elites passed through the institution. It is said that Oliver Tambo stood out to Mandela as he was one of the few science students who was 'politically articulate' and argumentative.<sup>39</sup> Tambo came from humble beginnings, acknowledges Meredith, his parents were poor and he was rescued from his village by Anglican missionaries.<sup>40</sup> It was through the Student Christian Association and the football team which Mandela properly met Tambo, despite their little contact during that time at the university, they would later form a lifelong friendship which was to become, as Meredith puts it "a central part of Mandela's life".<sup>41</sup> His closest friend at Fort Hare was Kaiser Matanzima, who would later become a fierce opponent of the ANC. Mandela condemned him of his *de facto* support of the apartheid government.<sup>42</sup> The government tried to play on this connection in negotiating with Mandela conditions for his release from prison; however, he sternly refused these terms. His friendship with Paul Mahabane was particularly influential, as the son of the twice president-general of the ANC, , one incident with a white man at the post office acted as a point of realisation for Mandela that the black man didn't have to accept the petty indignities that the white men threw at him.<sup>43</sup>

It was not just Mandela's fellow pupils that shaped him at university, it was also the professors. Z. K. Matthews was one of the first to graduate from Fort Hare in 1924, he studied the origins of the Civil Rights movement in America, by looking at Booker. T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, an autobiography of Washington himself which documented his life from slave child, through the difficulties to get an education in the segregated America. When Mandela was there Matthews was preaching success through hard work and moderation as Washington's book had.<sup>44</sup> Smith notes that throughout Matthews' time at Fort Hare his political stance change. In the early days, when Mandela was enrolled in the college he would have been considered a moderate, however, by the mid-1960s he had become more radicalised and his lectures often out rightly criticised the government.<sup>45</sup> Mandela also had great respect for D.D.T Jabavu, the first black professor at Fort Hare, who informed him of facts about his father that he had never been told, as he was a specialist in Xhosa genealogy.<sup>46</sup> It was at Fort Hare that he was able to connect his early childhood with his future.

Before attending Fort Hare Mandela had not given much serious thought to politics; however, it was here that he was nominated to stand as a candidate for one of the six seats on the Student Representative Council (SRC), which he was later successfully elected for. During Mandela's time there, complaints about the food given to the students reached boiling point and the SRC went through various boycotts. The result of these incidents brought out Mandela's stubborn side, one given to him by his notoriously stubborn father.<sup>47</sup>

Smith jokingly writes of the lesson Mandela took from playing John Wilkes Booth in a drama society production, 'a small but crucial role, laden with tempting symbolism about the dangers of standing up for what you believe in.'<sup>48</sup>

One of the overriding themes of Mandela's early life was the fact that he grew up in an environment that was free from overt racism. This shaped his vision of a racially equal world; however he had to go to Johannesburg and witness the racial discrimination to fully get a picture of the situation in South Africa. It would seem unfair to suggest that he, since the speech from Chief Meligqili, was set on his path to make South Africa racially equal as he had not truly felt racial prejudice until later in his earlier life.

It is clear to see that many events and people from Nelson Mandela's life up until 1940 had a huge effect on the man that he is today. His geneology, family and the tribal setting to which he grew up in would seem to have been the main aspect of shaping his personality. His time with Jongintaba taught him leadership skills, to which he drew upon throughout his life particularly during his leadership of the ANC and his presidency from 1994 to 1999. His mission schooling gave him his deep religious beliefs, and also it was here which he became sceptical of the foreign intervention in South Africa. It was at Fort Hare where he had his first real taste of politics, and where he met people who influenced his ideology and some who would later become his comrades in the fight against the apartheid government.

Henceforth, it can be concluded that the early events in Mandela's life had a profound effect on the trajectory that the rest of his life and political career would follow.

## Notes

1. Last stanza from W E Henley's poem '*Invictus*' published in 1875.
2. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.140
3. Boemher, E., *Nelson Mandela; A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 19
4. *Ibid* p. 18
5. *Ibid* p. 32
6. *Ibid* p. 33
7. Benson, M., *Nelson Mandela* (London: Penguin Books, 1986) p.15
8. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* (Great Britain: Penguin Group, 1997) p.1
9. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.2
10. Boemher, E., *Nelson Mandela* p. 22
11. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* (Great Britain: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.7
12. *Ibid* p.8
13. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.20
14. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.21
15. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.3
16. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.14
17. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.21
18. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.5
19. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.6
20. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.32
21. *Ibid* p.13
22. *Ibid* p.27
23. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.13
24. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.9
25. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.4
26. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.28
27. Boemher, E., *Nelson Mandela* p. 26
28. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.31
29. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.51
30. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.31
31. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.8
32. *Ibid* p.15
33. *Ibid* p.15

## Notes

34. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.31
35. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.4
36. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.16
37. *Ibid* p.18
38. *Ibid* p.18
39. Tambo, O., *Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (South Africa, David Phillips Publishers, 2004) p.105
40. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.19
41. *Ibid* p.19
42. Lodge, T., *Mandela A Critical Life* p.10
43. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.73
44. Boemher, E., *Nelson Mandela* p. 29
45. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.33
46. Mandela, N., *A Long Walk to Freedom* p.64
47. Meredith, M., *Mandela; A Biography* p.20
48. Smith, D. J., *Young Mandela* p.35

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## Was Reconstruction a failure?

*Vivian Nabukenya*

There is a tradition of historical writing on Reconstruction that sees the period as a failure. Following the Civil War, Presidential Reconstruction aimed to restore the bonds of the Union, whilst Congressional Reconstruction extended the civil and political rights of four million newly freed slaves though ratified the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. These sanctions had a profound impact upon American society, yet the extent of their impact has been contended. The historiography of Reconstruction pre-1950s was governed by William Dunning and John Burgess, who argued that it had damaged the south, and it was an error to give African Americans the right the to vote. By the 1960s this discourse of racist thought was being criticised by revisionists, who examined the experiences of blacks and suggested that reconstruction, whilst essentially being a failure, did have some positive outcomes. Post-revisionist C. Vann Woodward has offered further interpretations, emphasising that Reconstruction was 'conservative'; others argue that it did not go far enough.<sup>1</sup> The complexity of Reconstruction is therefore evident in the myriad debates and continuing efforts of historians to reassess the period. Yet it can be examined by looking at its political and economic consequences, as well as considering the effect it had upon the day-to-day lives of freed slaves and women, focusing particularly on the period 1865-1896. It must also be noted that Reconstruction was not a universal experience; it was a period that affected people differently depending on their

class, colour and state location.

The understanding of this epoch as a 'failure' can first be addressed by looking at the political consequences of Reconstruction. The fifteenth amendment granted African Americans the right to vote. According to Leon F. Litwack, this new political power bestowed upon the blacks was a triumph, as they voted in 'overwhelming numbers' with turn-outs exceeding 90 per cent, and exercised their power through participation in rallies, parades and in running for elected office.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Eric Foner notes the emergence of black Republicans including P. B. S. Pinchback and Pierre Landry, to name but two, who filled positions as congressmen, local officials, mayors and speakers in the south. In this way, the fifteenth amendment expanded the citizenry of African Americans, allowing them for the first time to independently shape the political makeup of America. For William Dunning, Reconstruction was in fact less effective than these positive life-stories imply. He promoted the idea of the 'undoing of Reconstruction', emphasising that African Americans in power were actually incompetent and barbaric, practicing 'tricks and knavery rather than the useful arts of politics'.<sup>45</sup> Contemporary activist W. E. B. Du Bois appears to agree, having stated that 'negroes... share of the spoils is true'. However, he counters Dunning's racial generalisation by arguing that only a small minority of black politicians took part, and those who did were often deceived and misrepresented by commentators.<sup>6</sup> Du Bois explains that many more blacks implemented reforms than were corrupt; the failure of Reconstruction should not, therefore, be traced to them, but rather to Southern whites, who used a 'Reign of Terror', discrediting black politicians and disenfranchising blacks as result of their growing and flourishing reform movement.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Dunning's account should not be overstated. Whilst some freedmen

were able to occupy prominent positions, many blacks were still unrepresented. Privileged southern whites angered by the Reconstruction acts implemented a series of measures that curtailed and effectively disenfranchised blacks, the illiterate and poor whites after the Reconstruction period. For instance, in 1889-90, poll taxes were introduced in Florida and Mississippi; anyone who did not pay could not vote. The latter state also enacted literacy tests and grandfather clauses.<sup>8</sup> For Steven Hahn, however, the Ku Klux Klan was an even more important deterrent from the ballot box. The Klan's activities such as lynching, patrolling and torture imposed great fear of violence upon blacks. As Hahn puts it, 'political power in the Reconstruction South grew out of the barrel of a gun'.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, whilst the Fifteenth Amendment was a significant milestone, it was ultimately a political failure, as it did not protect and guarantee rights. There were too many loopholes that allowed Southern whites to undermine its intention.

Another branch of research that has led historians to suggest that there were limitations with Reconstruction was the failure of its economic policies to improve the positions of blacks. One aim of Presidential Reconstruction was to rebuild the economy in states damaged by the Civil War through various enterprises and programs. Eric Foner, who observed the implementation of this economic legislation, explains that these enterprises led to 'profound changes', including the expansion of factory production, the establishment of the mining frontier and railroad aid.<sup>10</sup> However, Hahn presents a somewhat different picture, stating that these measures accomplished 'virtually nothing';

only a mere 422 miles of track were laid in eleven confederacy states, whilst other states obtained no aid at all.<sup>11</sup>

Post-revisionists have also exemplified the futility of attempted economic reform in the Freedmen's Bureau promise to distribute 'forty acres and a mule' to former slaves. This was a fanciful proposition and in reality, while slavery was eroded by the thirteenth amendment, it was quickly replaced by sharecropping – a new system of exploitation. Under the scheme, poor whites and blacks were trapped into a spiral of debt as they rented plots from landowners. Although labour relations did change, sharecropping still firmly entrenched inequality, retying freedmen back into an intricate hierarchical system. An ex-slave owner in Richmond neatly concluded that sharecropping was commercially beneficial to him, as it was 'quite as cheap to hire our labour as to own it'.<sup>12</sup> Reconstruction helped to usher in an 'economic revolution on a mighty scale' transforming the Confederacy into what James M. McPherson dubbed a 'New South'.<sup>13</sup>

Following the example of the more modern industrial North, Southern industry relocated its capital from agricultural crops to tobacco and iron, experiencing a 'spectacular growth in the 1880s', along with the emergence of industrialists such as James B. Duke of Durham.<sup>14</sup> As Alex Lichtenstein (paraphrasing Barbara Fields) puts it, 'the economy of the south saw a transition between one dominant mode of production [slavery] and another [capitalism]'.<sup>15</sup> John Majewski highlights that this was not a sudden phenomenon; Reconstruction facilitated

a series of ideological changes that were already being promoted by antebellum Southerners in the 1850s.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, unlike McPherson, the Dunning school believed that the consequences of Reconstruction had thrown the south into 'economic despair', further alienating the region after the Civil War.<sup>17</sup> The new system of labour and the shift to industrialisation benefitted wealthy Northern and Southern capitalists at the expense of blacks and poor whites, who were exploited, becoming an economic liability. The 'wage of the Negro worker, despite the war amendments, was to the level of bare subsistence by.... every method of discrimination'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Horace Mann Bond argues that Reconstruction was a largely a failure because its legislations and agencies had left blacks poor and had not protected their economic rights.<sup>19</sup>

Works on Reconstruction have also justified that it was a disaster by looking at the day-to-day lives of blacks, which were shaped by further inequality and the institutionalisation of segregation. The white response to emancipation was bitter both in the North and South, and freedmen were faced with great hostility from all ranks of society. In the North the influx of blacks received negative reactions from white workers, who perceived the freedmen as new competition in the labour market. Most striking, however, is the negative sentiment and resistance found in the *Post-bellum* South, where landowners were coming to terms with the loss of their authority over slaves, and the concept that they were now equal in terms of political and civil rights with the 'field-hands'. There are many instances of growing violence against blacks, including 'murders, shootings, whippings, robbing and brutal treatment of every kind',

organised not only by the Ku Klux Klan but also by members of the general public.<sup>20</sup>

Interpretations of Reconstruction have commonly focussed predominantly on the resentment displayed towards blacks. To grasp a wider picture, our attention should also be directed towards hatred amongst whites themselves, particularly from southerners who discriminated against “carpetbaggers” (Northerners who moved to the South during reconstruction) and “scalawaggs” (Southerners who voted Republican and supported reconstruction). This discrimination, of course, should be contextualised; the greater hostility was predominantly shown towards blacks. Another historiographical warning came from Du Bois, who argued that scholarly work often ignored the positive outcomes of Reconstruction. When assessing its affects upon the day-to-day lives of the emancipated people, he described the success of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which undertook the ‘herculean tasks’ of funding education, helping families to reunite, and providing food, water and clothing.<sup>21</sup> Yet Du Bois’s angle, too, is far from convincing; the Freedmen’s Bureau only lasted until 1872. Also, much of the Reconstruction legislation was quickly phased out, including the reversal of the 1875 Civil Rights Bill in 1883 and the Hayes-Tillman Compromise, which led to the emergence of Jim Crow laws. From this evidence, it is clear that the emancipation of the slaves brought with it new prospects, but also new anxieties and challenges. Therefore, in the over-all effort to change the day-to-day lives of Negroes it was, as Du Bois famously put it, a ‘splendid failure’.

Lastly, another issue that must be addressed in regards to the disappointments of the Reconstruction era is women. Central to the objective behind emancipation was that it had to provide equality to the oppressed group (slaves), yet what it had done was virtually ignore another element of its citizenry – women. Drew Gilpin Faust argues that women, like slaves, had played a crucial role on the home front during the civil war. Not surprisingly, however, traditional narratives have largely focused on men.<sup>22</sup> Demands for women’s suffrage had emerged before Reconstruction, led by activists including Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The cause was later advanced by Fredrick Douglas, who established the Americans Equal Rights Association in 1866 advocating equal rights for women. Nevertheless, Ellen Carol Du Bois commented that the universal suffrage campaign ‘lacked the urgent power of contemporary crisis’ evident in the fifteenth amendment, which stressed the expansion of political rights only ‘on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude’.<sup>23,24</sup> Donna Lee Dickerson also supports this contention, explaining that Congress was only willing to ratify legislation it considered to be ‘absolutely necessary’.<sup>25</sup> In this regard reconstruction was a failure, as it overlooked women’s suffrage.

Since the early scholarly study of Reconstruction, there has been a predominant feeling amongst historians that it was a failure. Undeniably, Reconstruction provided a legal framework for the political and civil rights of emancipated slaves, through legislation and the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. . It transformed the day-to-day lives of blacks politically and economically, giving them newfound freedoms. Its positive legacy is that it gave the emancipated slaves hope and some societal inclusion. There were, however, great limitations

to its triumph, as sanctions were overturned and evaded in the South, bringing new and sometimes greater fears for blacks and other oppressed groups. In more recent studies of Reconstruction, the success of the Civil Rights movement has provided a comparison which furthers the idea that the attempted reforms of the period failed. When African Americans were given full political and civil rights, the very limited successes of Reconstruction became less impressive in comparison. As Du Bois puts it, "the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery".<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

1. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863 – 1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), p. xxi.
2. Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the storm so long: the aftermath of slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 555.
3. Eric Foner, 'Rights and the Constitution in Black Life during the Civil War and Reconstruction', *Journal of American History*, 74 (1987), pp. 863–883 (p. 878).
4. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, p. xx.
5. William Dunning, "The Undoing of Reconstruction", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 88 (1901), pp. 435 – 576 (p. 438).
6. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Reconstruction and its Benefits" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 15 (1910), pp. 781-799 (p. 792).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 793.
8. Sharon D. Wright Austin, *The Transformation of Plantation Politics: Black Politics, Concentrated Poverty, And Social Capital in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 45.
9. Steven Hahn, *A nation under our feet: Black political struggles in the rural South, from slavery to the great migration* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 283.

## Notes

10. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction Revisited, Reviews in American History*, Vol. 10, pp. 82–100 (p. 94).
11. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution*, p. 213.
12. Litwack, *Been in the storm so long: the aftermath of slavery*, p. 197.
13. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black reconstruction in America: an essay toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880* (London: Cass, 1966), p. 346.
14. James M., McPherson, *Ordeal by fire: the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf: 1982), p. 610.
15. Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996), p. 11.
16. John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 160.
17. Laura F. Edwards, "Emancipation and Its Consequences" in John B. Boles (ed.) *A Companion to the American South* (Milton: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p. 270.
18. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, p. 670.
19. Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 84.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
21. Barry A. Crouch, *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Texans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. xiv.
22. Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War", *Journal of American History* (1990) 76, pp. 1200- 1228 (p. 1200).
23. Ellen Carol Du Bois, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 93–94.
24. US Const. amend. XV. Print.
25. Donna Lee Dickerson, *The Reconstruction Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1865 to 1877* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), p. 222.
26. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution*, p. 602.

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## Did Black suffrage secure Black freedom in the Reconstruction South?

*Andrew Short*

“and so the slave went free, stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”<sup>1</sup>

W.E B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*

This famous statement by the pioneering black intellectual Du Bois, is the best characterisation of the African-American experience from Emancipation, through Reconstruction and then Redemption.<sup>2</sup> African-Americans had secured a ‘new birth of freedom’ whereby the chattels of slavery, worn for two hundred years, had been forever broken. Not only this, but with the advent of Congressional or ‘Radical’ Reconstruction, freedmen had secured the right of suffrage and acceptance into American democratic discourse. Yet with the Redemption of the white South, African-Americans sank back into second class citizenship.

The Reconstruction Era has been subject to much historical analysis. With Revisionists and Post-Revisionists coming to varying conclusions on whether the ‘mere’ granting of suffrage was enough to secure black freedom, especially when, as post-revisionists highlight, the economic structure of the post-bellum South was virtually unchanged from the antebellum era.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite this, it will be argued that

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*Did Black Suffrage Secure Black Freedom In The Reconstruction South?*

the Reconstruction Era was this ‘brief moment in the sun’ for African-American freedom, and this was due to the granting of black suffrage. For black suffrage secured not only citizenship, but was ‘protective’ through African-Americans capturing political power in the ‘official’ realm of politics at national and state levels, but more importantly at the local everyday level.

Though it may seem a superfluous requirement, suffrage is in need of defining. Because if a narrow view of suffrage is held; the mere act of putting an election paper into a ballot box, this clearly rules out black freedom for nearly half the African-American population; women. Furthermore, this narrow view of suffrage only encompasses black political activity in the ‘official’ realm of politics. It will be argued that grassroots political activity that suffrage legitimised, which did not necessarily include the act of voting, was as much a guarantor of black freedom as black Congressmen or Sheriffs.

The more contentious aspect to be defined is freedom; specifically how did African-Americans conceive of their new status? Contrary to Southern white opinion free blacks had a real understanding of what freedom meant.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, freedom meant the restoration of families broken up by slavery, as Steven Hahn describes this, “may be regarded as among the first political acts that simultaneously rejected the legacy of enslavement and celebrated the vitals of freedom.”<sup>5</sup> Secondly, it meant the creation of separate and distinct institutions, especially churches, free from white control.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, freedom meant the access to education that had been denied to them as

slaves.<sup>7</sup> These are three specific pillars of African-American freedom that were denied to them as slaves.

However, though the three elements were vitally important to black freedom, to simply restrict freedom to them does not do justice to black aspirations. Because African-Americans conceived of freedom in the same manner as any Americans, that is the freedom embodied in America's republican heritage. This sentiment is embodied in the words of black Freedmen's Bureau official John M Langston, who said of the Declaration of Independence, it was "the broadest, the deepest, the most comprehensive and truthful definition of human freedom that was ever given to the world."<sup>8</sup> The classical republican rights and liberties associated with the traditional conception of American freedom were just as important to African-Americans. Thus, African-American freedom had a dual nature, focussing on the three specific aspects related to their experience as slaves, but also the wider notions of American republican freedom.

The granting of suffrage to freedmen of the South can be viewed as securing black freedom because it conferred one of the key rights of American citizenship upon African-Americans. This is not a point to dismiss, for in our age of political apathy it is easy to forget how significant the right of suffrage was. No other act could further renounce African-Americans past as slaves. The veteran abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison proclaimed that nothing equalled "this wonderful, quiet, sudden transformation of four million human being from (...) the auction-block

to the ballot box."<sup>9</sup>

However, this point is deeper, for in the democratic political culture of the United States suffrage meant inclusion into the collective public life, as Frederick Douglass claimed, "But here [the USA], where universal suffrage is the fundamental idea of the Government, to rule us [black men] out is to make us an exception, to brand us with the stigma of inferiority."<sup>10</sup> Thus, suffrage secured black freedom because firstly, it fulfilled a promise of American citizenship repudiating the legacy of slavery. Secondly; because it put freedmen on par with whites, both engaged in the mainstream democratic political discourse.

The suffrage gained and the political power it afforded was not mere symbolism, but was employed to safeguard black freedom in the Reconstruction South. Indeed, Union General turned politician, Carl Schurz emphasised make black freedom real it would be necessary to, "grant to the freedman some measure of self-protecting power in the form of suffrage."<sup>11</sup> This argument is credible, because through the political power freedmen attained in Southern State Congress' they were able to enact legislation that protected and furthered black freedom.

The most obvious example of such measures is the creation of public school systems throughout the Reconstruction South, as Du Bois states, "the public school systems in most Southern State began with the enfranchisement of the Negro."<sup>12</sup> In Reconstruction Florida the number of children enrolled in public schools trebled, whilst in South Carolina, the only state where freedmen had a majority on State Congress,

the number of pupils increased from 30,000 to 123,000.<sup>13</sup> As stated earlier, education was a central pillar of African-American's conception of freedom. Not only in education, but in labour relations freedmen's political power circumvented abuses by white employers that hampered black freedom. One measure used by plantation employers was to pay freedmen in checks that were only redeemable at a plantation store, yet the South Carolina legislature outlawed such practise.<sup>14</sup> Hence, suffrage secured black freedom, because through the political power it granted to African-Americans, they were able to protect and promote their freedom.

In contrast, it has been argued that the granting of suffrage was a futile gesture for black freedom, when the economics of the South remained unchanged. Eric Foner emphasises that ultimately Reconstruction failed to secure black freedom because the lack of capital or land redistribution. This failure ensured firstly, the survival of the planter class and their political power, secondly; that African-Americans became a class of dependent labourers.<sup>15</sup> In many ways blacks were still under the economic power of whites; a sentiment echoed by ex-slave Thomas Hall, who lamented in old age, "we still had to depend on the southern white man for work, food and clothing."<sup>16</sup> Despite the free labour ideology, even after the outlaw of 'Black Codes', freedmen did not enter into labour contracts similar to the Northern worker, but a contract that stipulated objective terms of service and imposed strict conditions of demeanour and attitude on the labourer.<sup>17</sup>

For many freedmen, this dependency on the former master could not be equated with freedom. Freedom meant gaining economic autonomy, whereby they could control the conditions and terms of labour.<sup>18</sup> In particular, this is linked to the African-American specific conception of freedom, as freedmen desired to withdraw their wives and children from labour, in order that their children could go to school and women could look after their families.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the sentiment of economic freedom is most clearly illustrated in African-Americans desires for land redistribution. Even before the advent of Radical Reconstruction this was deeply held; when Gen. Sherman and Secretary of War Stanton met with black leaders in Savannah, G.A 1865 and asked them what freedom meant to blacks, the leaders responded it involved, "placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves ...The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor."<sup>20</sup> Hence, it could be argued that black suffrage did not secure black freedom because freed-peoples were still under the economic control of whites; this dependency was a blight on black freedom.

Nevertheless, the fact there was no land redistribution does not entail that black freedom was insecure. Primarily 'digging' freedom out of the soil required significant capital investment that few former slaves could afford.<sup>21</sup> And without some form of political power access to capital and markets would be blocked.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, sharecropping, the eventual arrangement of free black labour, gave freed peoples considerably more power over the conditions of labour than wage labour. In particular it structured labour around the family unit, which was central to black freedom,

freedom.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, sharecropping offered an escape from gang labour and white supervision.<sup>24</sup> Though now possessed with negative connotations, at the time it was understood differently. Sharecropping, as Foner himself writes, “afforded agricultural labourers more control over their own time, labour, and family arrangements, and more hope of economic advancement than many other modes of labour organisation.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it must be remembered the plight of the small scale white farmers during this Era, particularly with the advent of the ‘Long Depression’ in the 1870s, blacks would have hardly been immune.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, to claim that African-American freedom was insecure because of the lack of land redistribution is mistaken, as sharecropping afforded African-Americans many freedoms they desired. And land redistribution without political power would have been fruitless.

Was the freedom secured by suffrage universal to all African-Americans, or was the freedom greater or lesser to certain groups or classes? It is arguable that the granting of black suffrage disproportionality secured the freedom of those African-Americans who possessed economic security; whilst those who did not have this security, predominantly ex-slaves, being dependent on whites, were subject to economic intimidation which diminished their freedom. For many former-slaves in the rural South ‘survival-ship’ took precedence over abstract notions of rights and suffrage.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is no coincidence that The New Orleans Tribune, representative of the economically secure and prosperous black Creole community in Louisiana,

was one of the foremost advocates of black suffrage in the Reconstruction Era.<sup>28</sup> Not just in Louisiana, but throughout the Reconstruction South the leading black politicians had three common denominators; they were freedmen pre-Civil War, they either owned small businesses or were skilled labourers and they overwhelmingly lived in urban areas of the South.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that black suffrage may not have secured black freedom for many former slaves, to the same extent as those who were already economically secure were able to enjoy the classical republican liberty.

Yet the actions of freedmen themselves demonstrate that despite economic intimidation, in practise it was no such impediment to black freedom. The exceedingly high voter registration and election turnout amongst freedmen clearly illustrates this. For example, in Dougherty and Sumter Counties in rural ‘cotton belt’ Georgia, out of black voting population of 2300, near 2000 black voters registered in each county respectively.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, when elections were held for State Conventions in 1867, voter turnout amongst freedmen was exceedingly high, in Virginia turnout was 90 per cent, in Georgia 75 per cent and in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana 80 per cent of eligible freedmen voted.<sup>31</sup> Though many of the leading black politicians were of a more privileged background than the newly liberated former slaves, politics in any society is generally the reserve of the privileged. Thus, black suffrage did secure African-American freedom in the Reconstruction South because it was not restricted to the economic independent, but those freedmen who still depended on whites economically.

Post-revisionist historians emphasise there were major limitations on black

political power. In particular, African-Americans were underrepresented in the political realm, even during Radical Reconstruction; there were only two black US Senators, sixteen US Representatives and no elected governors.<sup>32</sup> In State Legislatures, only in South Carolina did freedmen have a majority, and even elected a black speaker, whilst in Mississippi despite being another state with a black majority population, politics was controlled by white 'carpet baggers.'<sup>33</sup> Moreover, few freedmen held major offices during the Reconstruction Era, in five states; Texas, North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia and Virginia no African-American held a major office, and only in Louisiana did blacks hold more than one major office.<sup>34</sup> This questions whether black suffrage secured black freedom because it suggests African-Americans did not achieve the political power and influence on the State and Federal level necessary to protect and promote black freedom.

Despite this, to restrict the scope of analysis to the higher levels of political office is to neglect the extent of black political influence in local offices and the grassroots political activity of African-Americans. The largest numbers of black office holders were at a local level, on counties or small municipalities. Over one thousand elective or appointive local offices were filled by African-Americans in the Reconstruction South, with over 80 per cent of these offices being in rural and small town counties.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, African-Americans were not restricted to insignificant local offices, for example there were 19 black County Sheriffs in Louisiana and 15 in Mississippi.<sup>36</sup> In town councils there was notable African-American influence,

Nashville, Tennessee council was over a third African-American.<sup>37</sup> Far from inconsequential, the political power exercised on a local level was in many ways more significant and relevant to ordinary folk than legislatures or Federal representatives; as local officials dealt with the "practical rights of the people."<sup>38</sup> For example, in the South Carolina rice growing region planters complained at the election of blacks to local offices as it 'complicated' labour relations between working freedmen and white employers, as it curbed the abuses of white employers such as withholding pay or freedmen's share of the crop.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, there were still obstructions to African-Americans attaining local offices, in particular the posting of bond requirement, which few African-Americans could reasonably afford. Sheriffs had to post bonds between \$5000 and \$90,000, whilst tax assessors and collectors had to post as much as double the tax income of their counties and even a lowly clerk had to post several thousand dollars.<sup>40</sup> However this bond requirement should not be interpreted as suggesting black freedom was insecure. For this same requirement existed in the Antebellum South and to white as well as black office holders; and in actual fact Reconstruction State legislatures altered the conditions of bond payments so that individuals from outside of the county could contribute to the payment of a bond, thereby diminishing the stranglehold resident planters had over local politics.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, black suffrage secured black freedom because African-American political influence was not only restricted to the State and Federal level, but had an impact locally on issues that would affect blacks

'everyday freedom.'

Furthermore, the political mobilisation of African-Americans at the grassroots level illustrates that black suffrage secured black freedom. This grassroots political activism, which the granting of suffrage legitimised, was the vehicle through which African-Americans could stake their claim as citizens engaged in the democratic political life of the USA.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, as Steven Hahn describes, the Union League was also an African-American institution for "community development, defence and self-determination."<sup>43</sup> Hence it catered to the dual natured conception of African-American freedom. The extent of black political activism in the Union League cannot be underestimated; the Union League had councils in a majority of counties in the South, particularly in the 'Black Belt.'<sup>44</sup> This political activism was not restricted to men either, due to the Union League being a grassroots community institution, there was no restriction on female participation. Many African-American women utilised this freedom they found in Union League joining meetings, councils and rallies, even to the consternation of men.<sup>45</sup> As with local officials, the grassroots political activism also dealt with African-American's 'everyday' freedom. For example, in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, the Union League organised a co-operative store and when a local black man was arrested, the local League marched to the county seat to protest.<sup>46</sup> Hence, black suffrage and the subsequent grassroots political activity, secured black freedom because it fulfilled both aspects of African-American conception on freedom.

In confirming their status as active citizens involved American democratic politics and as an institution controlled and run at a grassroots level by the community to protect their freedom.

Nonetheless, what use were the 'formal' freedoms in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, when African-Americans could be murdered or subject to violence by Ku Klux Klan? There was an extensive campaign of terror by the Klan against African-Americans, including murders, lynching and beatings which seemed to undo many of the freedoms African-Americans had gained. This dichotomy is most clearly illustrated by the case of freedman Charles Caldwell of Mississippi, as Howard Zinn describes Caldwell was "the first Negro to kill a white [in self-defence] in Mississippi and go free after a trial. But on Christmas Day 1875, Caldwell was shot to death by a white gang."<sup>47</sup> For all the rights and freedoms afforded to African-Americans, all could be undone by murder.

However, African-American suffrage was the best weapon to protect black freedom from violence. Empowered with the vote African-Americans were now a major voting group in the political landscape to which the Republicans, and in particular President Grant, had to give due consideration. The Enforcement Acts are a demonstration of this. The Acts, enacted during Grants presidency to combat the KKK, virtually decimated the Klan.<sup>48</sup> Though the Acts fulfilled a need for justice, it cannot be denied Grant was conscious of the fact that the African-American vote kept him in power.<sup>49</sup> In the 1868 Presidential Election, the first where black men could vote, Grant won the election, by a close margin of 300 000 in the popular vote, thanks to the votes of 700 000 freedmen.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, black suffrage secured freedom because suffrage created a constituent of the electorate that politicians needed to take consideration of when formulating policy.

In conclusion, suffrage secured this 'brief moment in the sun' for black freedom in the Reconstruction South. Suffrage allowed African-Americans to attain their dual natured

conception of freedom. It conferred citizenship that signalled to African-Americans their inclusion into American republican heritage. Through the political power it afforded, blacks were able to promote education policies in State Legislatures. Though African-Americans were still 'dependent' on whites economically, sharecropping afforded freedoms on working conditions and family structures. However as highlighted, freedmen did not monopolise political power on State and Federal level, but a more fundamental transformation occurred on a local level. Here black officials protected 'everyday' freedoms and grassroots political activity in the Union League was the vehicle through by which black freedom could be realised. The importance of black suffrage to black freedom is demonstrated by the fact that it was the loss of political power that signalled the end of 'the brief moment in the sun.' For it was through the Redemption of Southern whites that the campaign against black freedom was most systematic and complete. Through this political power the Redeemed "governments slashed spending on education, overturned civil rights laws, promoted policies favourable to planters than labourers, and discouraged black voting."<sup>51</sup> This insight, on the importance of political power to black freedom, was echoed by a North Carolinian freedman who explained to a Northern visitor on polling day, "I tell you, sah, we aint noways safe 'long as dem people makes de laws we's got to be governed by."<sup>52</sup>

Notes

1. W. E. B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p.30.
2. In this essay, because the focus is on black suffrage, it will primarily refer to the years 1866; the beginning of Radical Reconstruction; to the commonly accepted end of Reconstruction 1877 and Redemption.
3. Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper, 1990), pp.xiii-xv.

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4. Eric Foner, 'Rights and the Constitution in Black Life during the Civil War and Reconstruction', *The Journal of American History* (December 1987) 74/03, pp.869-870.
5. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet* (London: Belknap Press, 2003), p.166.
6. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Harper, 1988), p.88.
7. Du Bois, *Black*, p.123.
8. Foner, 'Rights and the Constitution in Black Life', p. 873.
9. Brooks D. Simpson, *Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), pp.177-178.
10. Foner, 'Rights and the Constitution in Black Life', p. 872.
11. W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Reconstruction and its Benefits', *The American Historical Review* (July 1910) 15/04, p.785.
12. Du Bois, *Black*, pp.648-649.
13. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p.183.
14. Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (Baton: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p.91.
15. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.603.
16. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper, 2005), pp.197-198.
17. Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p.413.
18. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.103.
19. Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet* p.171.
20. Freedmen and Southern Society Project, Newspaper Account of a Meeting between Black Religious Leaders and Union Military Authorities, February 13, 1865; <http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/savmtg.htm> [Accessed 17/11/2012]
21. Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.146.
22. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.214.
23. Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet* p.169.
24. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.174.
25. Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, p.45.
26. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.109.
27. O'Donovan, *Becoming Free*, p.247.
28. James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p.280.
29. O'Donovan, *Becoming Free*, pp.236-237.
30. *Ibid.*, p.248.

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31. Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, p.203.
32. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, p.223.
33. Stamp, *The Era of Reconstruction*, p.167.
34. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.352.
35. Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, pp.219-220.
36. Foner, *Reconstruction*, p.356.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p.355.
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## To what extent was 'race' used to categorise people as 'other' in early modern England?

*Joanna Hill*

The concept of 'race' – understood as the categorisation of people based on physical characteristics – was used significantly in classifying 'others'. English society, in the early modern era, conceived distinct physical characteristics as a determinate of a person's origin. Greater numbers of 'others', who were people of unknown origin, came into England under the reign of Elizabeth I. Physical attributes of 'others' were judged to determine where these people fitted within the English social hierarchy. The concept of 'race' became increasingly prevalent in early modern Europe as people began to consider united identities within their society. A sense of 'Englishness' developed as a significant proportion of the English population believed that they had originated in England. People who came into England from elsewhere were subsequently labelled as 'others' or 'strangers'.

This essay will discuss the scientific definition of race that emerged in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century and how this is no longer compatible due to recent studies into the variations of genes across humankind. The social definition of 'race', which is generally used today, will be discussed in relation to the English early modern definition of race. The social hierarchy that existed within early modern England will be considered, and how, due to the visual nature of English culture,

people's identity was determined by their physical appearance. English society judged the skin colour of 'others'. People who had come from Africa, usually having a different colour skin to those who considered themselves to be 'English', were not favoured within the existing social hierarchy. Judgments about 'others' based on the shape and size of their facial features is another indicator of how English society did not consider as being agreeable features that were common amongst the people from Africa. Finally the essay will examine how English society reacted to the increasing presence of 'others' in Early modern England and how discrimination manifested in a 'racial' manner.

Biological justification for categorizing people by 'race' has been disproved. In the nineteenth century, attempts were made to 'systemize racial division'.<sup>1</sup> An extreme case of systematic racial division was the aim for the 'consolidation of the Aryan race' by the National Socialist German Workers' Party in the 1920's.<sup>2</sup> This party manipulated the reasoning Charles Darwin had given to try and find a biological reason for differences between humans.<sup>3</sup> From the findings of Darwin, a scientific definition of 'race' developed. The Human Genome Project disproved the scientific reasoning behind racial division "although frequencies for different states of a gene [alleles] differ among races, we have no 'race gene'- that is state's fixed in certain races and absent from others."<sup>4</sup> It has also been argued that genetic differences between two individuals in a population may display greater variation than between two individuals

from different populations and such a distinction does not seem to correlate with skin pigmentation.<sup>5</sup> The biological argument for genetic differentiation between races with humankind has been disputed. The definition of 'race' remains as a method to socially categorize humankind due to "distinct physical characteristics."<sup>6</sup> Anu Korhonen suggested that, 'in everyday life, blackness was of course primarily visual: the 'radicalising' gaze directed at black Africans was a process of giving meaning to perception and direct observation, to the sight of blackness.'<sup>7</sup> English people tried to make sense of 'others' they came across on English streets and subsequently different 'races' were categorised within the existing social hierarchy.

The use of the term 'race', within Early Modern England, was a way of categorizing people to fit into the existing social hierarchy. In the early sixteenth-century, the Italian word "Razzá" meant 'of unknown ultimate origin.'<sup>8</sup> In Florio's 1611 Italian-English Dictionary "Razzá" meant "a race, a kind, a broode, a flocke, a descent, a pedigree."<sup>9</sup> It can be argued then that 'race' in England in the early seventeenth century followed this definition. People were categorised into different races based on where they were perceived to be 'from'; both geographically and ancestrally. The use of the word "pedigree" also suggests that there was an element of hierarchy involved in describing a person's 'race'; which suggests connotations of 'good' and 'bad' breeding. This implies that 'race' featured as a factor in the social categorization of humankind in England. The concept of 'race' existed long before

the scientific definition, which developed in the nineteenth century, and this concept was a social construct as it is today.

English visual culture perceived the 'outer' appearance to be a reflection of the 'inner' self. People from sub-Saharan Africa that came into England were judged on their physical attributes in order to determine their place within the existing social hierarchy. The social structure within England was ordered around 'divinely ordained' hierarchical relationships.<sup>10</sup> The natural order principle, developed by humanist ideology perceived humankind to be on a 'chain of being', sandwiched between angels and beasts. This social structure had developed during the medieval era but had continued to influence society's concept of the hierarchy that was divinely ordained in England. Sujata Iyengar suggested that 'the dominant structure of feeling is always tempered by residual structures from the previous generation, and emergent ones from the one ahead.'<sup>11</sup> The social hierarchy in England had developed from past generations that did not come in to contact with people who looked different to themselves. A sense of English identity had developed along with how a person's place in society was determined based on their visual identity. As people from Africa came into England their appearance was judged and they were usually categorised as low beings in society. The physical characteristics of people of African origin were deemed to be unfavourable in the existing social hierarchy.

Early modern English society was obsessed with lineage and establishing an

identity within the social order. People who came from Africa to England, during the reign of Elizabeth I, were of 'unknown ultimate origin'. The origin or lineage of 'others' did not fit with what people perceived English identity to be. This was due to the difference in the physical appearance between sub-Saharan Africans and the stereotypical 'Englishness'. It could be suggested that 'origin' and civilization 'others' had previously belonged to was imagined. The people who had come from Africa may have had similar physical attributes to what people from England had seen or heard about when Africa was depicted.

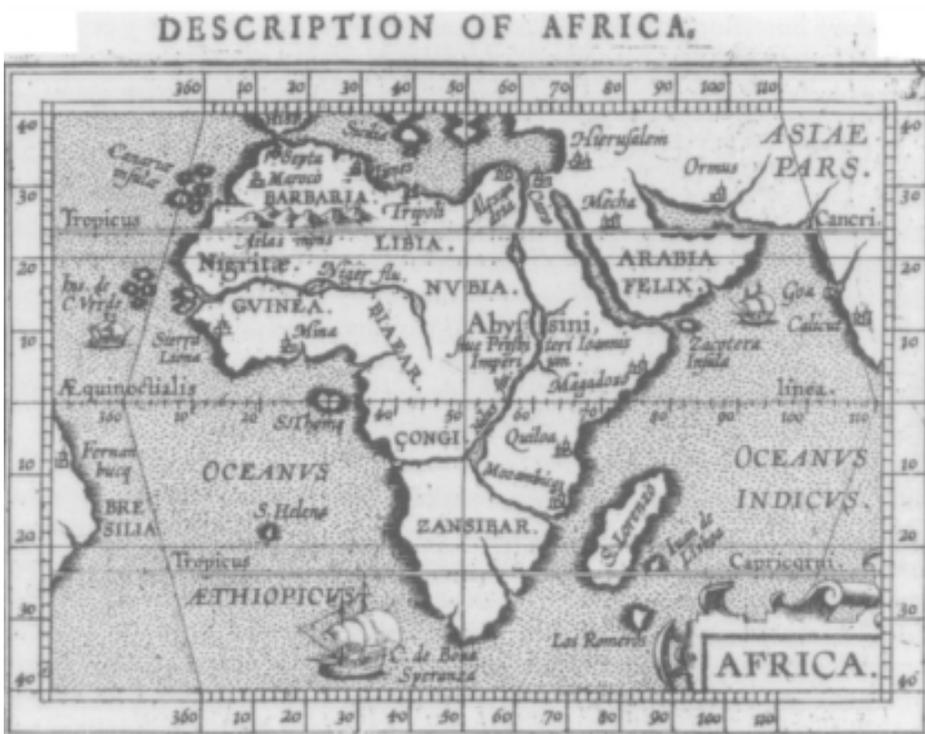


Fig. 1.<sup>12</sup>

On this map an area on the African continent has been labelled as 'barbaria.' Alden and Virginia Vaughan propose that the map 'locates Guinea and associates blackness with sub-Saharan Africa.'<sup>13</sup> This image suggests that Africa may have been perceived to be a barbaric society and if people are black in Africa 'others', who were black, may also be barbaric. From this conception black 'others' would be considered to have a low status in a 'civilized' society. Michel de Montaigne observes that 'we all call barbarians anything that is contrary to our own habits.'<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 2.<sup>15</sup>

The *Queen Mary Atlas* depicts primitive beings. The people that are painted on the land mass of Africa are holding spears and wearing loin cloths, which from the perspective of an English person living in 'civilized' society may seem barbaric. Maps in renaissance Europe used images to depict things which you may find in that place. Most maps in early modern Europe depicted African people with black skin, which they did have, and all sorts of strange features that they did not have such as three headed people. This suggests people who came into contact with images like this, without ever having seen people with a different features before may have considered these 'others' as of being a different 'kind' of being to them; from a far off land with different manners and customs.

Stories that may have been retold from travel narratives may have influenced people's perceptions of 'others' before people from Africa had even come to England. Mandeville, who was English born, wrote about Africa and its people in his *Travels of John Mandeville*. This work influenced European perceptions of African society. The likes of Leonardo Da Vinci, whose library itinerary of 1499 had contained a copy of the *Travels*. Frobisher in 1576 was thought to have had as copy with him as he sailed into Boffin Bay. A copy of *Travels* was available in the English vernacular in 1496. In 1605 Bishop Joseph Hall said 'Whetstone leasings (lies) of old Mandeville.'<sup>16</sup> Even though Hall speaks of Mandeville 'lies' the stories still circulated and as elements of his writings were believed the narrative, on the whole, was

influential. Mandeville reported on what he called Ethiopie and wrote:

Such men that have but one foote, and they go so fast that it is a great mervaille, and that is a large foot that the shadow thereof covereth the body from the Sun or raine when they lye upon their backs, and when their children are first borne they looke like russet, and when they wax old then they bee all black.<sup>17</sup>

Mandeville emphasized here that African people were of different shapes to European people and as he was probably the most widely read authority on places outside of Europe his descriptions were greatly influential in England on English imaginings of Africa. The descriptions of African people, by those who travelled from England to Africa in 1554, suggest how English people saw Africa through the restrictions of their own concept of what an ideal society was. Here Guinea is discussed "negroes, a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or common wealth, and so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne, that in many places they curse it when it riseth."<sup>18</sup> The narrative continues later saying "a rough and savage region, whose inhabitants are wilde and wandering people."<sup>19</sup> These people do not conform to their idea of English 'civilized' society and the people who are coming into England are viewed as being from 'uncivilized' society. English people came into contact more with 'others', during the reign of Elizabeth I, and 'others' did not look like anyone they had seen before. The origin of these people was invariably unknown and for those who had come into contact with stories of the African continent would probably have imagined these

people to have been from uncivilized society and socially beneath their own.

Idea about skin colour, in early modern English society, existed long before the presence of black African people. Skin colour became a visible indicator of where a person was from in early modern England. Knowledge about the culture of Africa, whether reliable or not, had been available to literate English men and women through the translation of ancient texts. Ancient works such as that of Pliny the Elder, Strabo and Herodotus were translated from Latin and Greek to English during the sixteenth century. Herodotus wrote that the African people were "in countenance a like black, in hayre a like fryzled."<sup>20</sup> This statement suggests that Herodotus perceived that black people had a certain type of 'countenance'. Frank Snowden argued that within ancient culture 'race' and cultural differences were segregated within society; however in his argument physical features and skin pigmentation convey aspects of ethnicity, without any implied suggestions of inferiority or superiority.<sup>21</sup> This may have been the case in ancient Europe, however, during early modern England; a whiter complexion was more preferential to a darker one. 'Beauty' was a sign of 'goodness' and the colour of a person's skin was crucial when considering if a person was 'beautiful' and therefore 'good' or not. 'Goodness' showed where a person stood within the 'chain of being' and this was a determinant for their status in English society; closer to angles or closer to beasts. As greater numbers of people from sub-Saharan Africa came into England, they

were judged through the existing social hierarchy, and their skin colour was a visual indicator for their place. Kim Hall has suggested that 'black' was not always the opposite of 'white' but instead the opposite of 'fair' or 'beautiful.'<sup>22</sup> People from Africa were, most commonly, the darkest skin colour seen in England at the time and therefore possibly perceived to be the least 'fair. Thomas Becon in a conduct book argued that silent and chaste women were always fair, even if they looked like an Ethiopian.<sup>23</sup> Becon appears to be against the common judgement in his suggestion that outward appearance may not always be a reflection of a person's countenance. Thomas Hall saw 'blackness' as a punishment from God as he argued that vain women should be burned for their sins and forced to scorch their skin in the sun until they acquired the 'hue of the black-moores' suggesting that this was inferior to being the colour they had previously been.<sup>24</sup> This may indicate that having black skin would make you into an outsider in English society or place a person lower down on the social scale. Although a white woman who had been blackened, would not therefore be perceived as being from a different 'race' but, would lose her previous identity. Her standing in society would be wiped out as black skin was burnt on and she would become like the 'black-moore'; without an origin, her perceived 'goodness' lost. As blackness was related to inner 'badness' black people coming from Africa were automatically seen as inferior to white English people as their soul was judged on the gradation of their skin colour.

As English society, between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, perceived the 'outer' to be a reflection of the 'inner' it is beneficial to determine what the early

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modern idea of 'beauty' in England followed 'the premise that bodily attractiveness consists in harmonious proportion to all bodily parts and features, and the Petrarchist convention of seeing, enumerating and describing those bodily parts as linked together by a sweeping gaze that travels over the body.'<sup>25</sup> In saying this Anu Korhonen suggested that good looks meant that bodily features had to be balanced with each other, however, balanced in the English sense of balanced. This idea is especially important when considering English people coming into contact with sub-Saharan African people who had different facial features to them. The stereotype of Africans as having thick lips, flat noses and black curly hair was not deemed to be beautiful within the English frame work. William Dunbar's poem 'Of ane blak-moir' the 'beautiful' black women is likened to apes and cats on the basis of her facial features.<sup>26</sup> This concept presented by Dunbar suggests that the shape and balance of facial features brings with it ideas of where the person originated and Dunbar is perhaps suggesting that this woman may be 'beautiful' but she is like certain animals. On the 'chain of being' this likening would imply that this woman had a low status within the English hierarchy. This idea of the balance of facial features in determining 'beauty' was also a marker of a person's intelligence. Korhonen asserted that there was a conceptual tradition in Europe which linked lack of intelligence and stereotypical African features.<sup>27</sup> Juliana Schiesari also suggested that in this tradition, big lips and large noses signified stupidity.<sup>28</sup> Accounts from the time such as Camões's, in the sixteenth-century, of a 'black skinned stranger' that was 'a

savage more uncouth than Polyphemus, he could not understand us'; Polyphemus is a savage that Homer wrote about. Camões goes on to explain that the 'savage' did not care about the gold that they showed him.<sup>29</sup> Walter Lim argued that these people accounting about a 'savage' perceived that along with the 'inability to engage in intelligible discourse, the Negro also lacks the basic ability to recognise things of value.'<sup>30</sup> African society was usually envisioned in the English mind as been undeveloped and lacking in the things that made English society 'civilized'. As people from Africa were coming into England, features which defined them as having originated from Africa, this savage society, meant that their intelligence was judged to be inferior to that of an English person. The intelligence of the person was not being judged but the black person's imagined intelligence based on their facial features suggesting that they were of inferior intellect to a white person.

People in Elizabethan England were discriminated against on the basis of their perceived origin due to physical features which indicated them as 'other'. The English in the early modern world began as Hall stated to 'formulate the notions of "self" and "other."<sup>31</sup> The increasing presence of 'others' encouraged the strengthening of the meaning of Englishness and a specifically English identity. Tensions between 'other' and 'English' were exacerbated, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century, by economic and political problems. 'Strangers' were attacked in riots in London indicated in the manuscript by Thomas More between 1601 and 1604. A play was also created by

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Shakespeare which included this manuscript but was never shown due to the fear of public reaction. It has been argued that Elizabeth I herself, around the same time, discriminated against different types of people that specifically had black skin. 1596 Elizabeth wrote an “open letter to lord Maiour of London” and complained that “there are of late divers blackmoores brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are already here to manie.”<sup>32</sup> Later in the same month Elizabeth I issued “an open warrant” to help Lubeck Senden “to take up blackamoores here in this realme and to transport them into Spaine and Portugall.”<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth I forcibly expelled people who had black skin and were from Africa. ‘Moore’ was used in relation to both northern and sub-Saharan Africans. Elizabeth wanted to retain a sense of Englishness and a specific identity during war against Spain. Iyengar suggested that it was the union of the opposite of black and fair, fair related to an English identity, which allowed the Elizabethan society to flourish.<sup>34</sup> In Britain Elizabeth used the Coverdale version of the *Great Bible* that had been authorized by Henry VIII and in the *Song* a woman stated “I am blacke but ye fayre and well favoured” “Marvaile not at mee that I am so blacke, for why? The Sunne hath shined upon me: my mother’s children have evill will at me.”<sup>35</sup> “Black but...” formulation, considered by Kate Lowe, was adopted in England and exceptions to the imagined origin and countenance of people from Africa enabled the concept of ‘race’ to be a justification for judging ‘others’ as not belonging and being lower on the social scale in England.<sup>36</sup>

The social definition that is used to describe ‘race’ was the idea that was used to define people as ‘other’ early modern England. Social hierarchy that existed, within early modern England, was used to determine the identity of a person. Physical appearance was judged and subsequently a person’s place in English society was determined. English society judged skin colour of ‘others’, who had come from Africa, and because of the existing social hierarchy ‘black’ skin was not favoured in English culture. The judgments that were made about ‘others’ based on the shape and size of their facial features were also seen as ugly and suggested in the minds of some English people that these people were not intelligent. The existing social hierarchy in early modern England perceived ‘black’ skin to be the opposite to ‘fair’ and unbalanced facial features to be an indicator of a person’s low intellect. People also judged these features to be of different origin to the English and discrimination during Elizabeth I’s reign was manifested along ‘racial’ lines due to the perceived origin of ‘others’. Further research in to the relationship between ‘other’ and those who considered themselves to be ‘English’ may show how much of the English population worked within the social hierarchy to categorise people according to their perceived origin.

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Was Mandela's decision to support the move to armed struggle justified?

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Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was founded in 1961 by influential members of the African National Congress (ANC) including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Joe Modise. In 1960 both the ANC and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) decided to protest against the pass-laws which limited the movement of Africans, Coloureds and Indians throughout the country. On 23 March 1960 protestors in Sharpeville were gunned down by the police, sixty-nine died and many were injured. As a result, some of the younger more radical members of the ANC came to the conclusion that a peaceful resistance against a militant government was futile. T. Lodge writes how Sharpeville was a turning point which forced key African leaders to rethink their methods of resistance. But was Mandela justified in supporting this move? To understand this we have to (attempt) to examine Mandela as a contemporary. What options seemed realistic at the time? Had global events signalled that now was the time to begin a resistance movement? It is through trying to understand the options contemporaries thought were necessary that allows us to say whether an armed struggle was justified. Mandela's Rivonia Trail speech outlines the aims of MK in an attempt to justify MK's methods. This included preventing a racial civil war and future Sharpeville massacres. The time for action also appeared right internationally in the 1960s.

The Algerians were fighting the French, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana began receiving military training from China after claiming he was a pan-African leader, and towards the end of the decade Castro's guerrillas managed to overthrow the Batista regime in Cuba. If we attempt to examine the choices available to the ANC at the time and take Mandela's Rivonia speech at face value, it can be said that Mandela's decision to support the armed struggle was justified. Nevertheless the recent writings of S. Ellis have shed new light on Mandela's role in Umkhonto we Sizwe. Ellis has shown that the South African Communist Party (SACP) had considered the potential of an armed struggle long before the ANC, and by 1960 SACP had already contacted international communist allies for support. Ellis further argues that Mandela (despite his denial) was a member of both SACP and the ANC, and this is why he was chosen as the man to persuade (the non-violent) Chief Luthuli of the ANC and lead MK itself. If Mandela indeed was a member of both organisations his decision to support armed struggle is perhaps more justified. An ill-prepared sabotage campaign could have caused damage, serving only to turn public opinion against the ANC. The SACP was the most prepared organisation, its members held a Marxist framework of action and some had already been educated in combat experience. The Sharpeville massacre showed that further peaceful protest would lead to more deaths. MK was justified as it sought to avoid more blood being spilled while attempting to force a government which refused to engage in talks to begin negotiations.

T. Lodge views the Sharpeville massacre as an event that forces African leaders to

to rethink their policy forcing them to think in terms of 'revolutionary strategy'.<sup>1</sup> The massacre at Sharpeville certainly bought into question the success of passive resistance. Protests in Sharpeville had their origins in December 1959 when the ANC had voted to initiate a nationwide antipass campaign. This was set to begin on 31 March and end on 26 June.<sup>2</sup> The PAC however, refused to join the campaign instead proposing an alternate antipass campaign ten days before that of the ANC.<sup>3</sup> Mandela himself saw this as a petty attempt to undermine the ANC with 'a blatant case of opportunism', he would later write. The PAC nationwide antipass campaign failed on a national level, although large crowds did meet in the town of Sharpeville in the Transvaal, residents of Sharpeville had reason to be agitated. High rents had led to two thousand, three hundred and ten residents to default on rent in the January of 1960 and unemployment figures were also on the rise. To add to these economic hardships, African citizens of Sharpeville felt harassed by a racist police force.<sup>4</sup> Due to these factors and a strong resentment of the pass laws (*Natives Act 1952*) crowds gathered to peacefully protest against the unjust laws. Soon armoured cars cornered off the crowd as loud speakers announced in Afrikaans that this protest was illegal and that the people must disperse immediately. There was no response from the crowd.<sup>5</sup> Peter Parker who was present during the protest remembers how, after being instructed to leave, riot police began climbing out of vans and harassing the protestors.<sup>6</sup> Minutes later tear gas was thrown into the crowd. The crowd consisted of about five thousand protestors and only three

hundred police, at 1:15pm the crowd moved beyond the gate surrounding the police station. This movement was met by some of the more inexperienced officers firing into the crowd (perhaps in panic).<sup>7</sup> The result of the massacre was that sixty-nine had died, and one hundred and eighty had been injured. Out of the event at Sharpeville militarism began to gain further ground in the ANC.

It was thought by leading men such as Mandela and Tambo that peaceful protest would no longer be successful against a violent government, if peaceful protest continued, it was thought, there would only be countless more Sharpevilles.<sup>8</sup> The massacre led to global disapproval of the Nationalist Party government, and a withdrawal of investment. This global reaction would later be used to justify the methods of MK. Outrage regarding the events at Sharpeville and criticisms of the Nationalist Government came from both the American State Department, and for the first time the United Nations.<sup>9</sup> Foreign companies and investors also acted unfavourably, South Africa's economy did not appear to be as stable as previously thought. This resulted in a short term business slump, and even led one minister to call for reforms on 'African policy'.<sup>10</sup> Lodge has argued that the global reaction only vindicates the use of a sabotage campaign that would attempt to generate worldwide support and force the National Party to negotiate. Yet Lodge goes further to suggest that the non-cooperative methods of the Defiance Campaign were doomed to fail from the start as 'non-violence ducked the issue of how to respond to the threat of violence by the authorities'.<sup>11</sup> Lodge is right that the

international reaction of Sharpeville justifies the methods taken up by MK, however an armed struggle was not inevitable. The Indian resistance to the *Rowlatt Act* (which allowed the government to imprison without trial) in 1919 has comparable elements with the massacre at Sharpeville. The defiance at Amritsar, like that in Sharpeville, culminated in a mass gathering. Again similar to Sharpeville, authorities opened fire on protestors killing three hundred people, yet this led to a period of renewed non-cooperation campaigns.<sup>12</sup> While Amritsar was a different time and place to Sharpeville, it does show that the official protest movement can continue to use non-violent means even after being met with violence. In South Africa peaceful protests would still have received worldwide attention, although many more may have died, it would have been a waste of life. Looking at the options open to Mandela at the time his decision to move to armed struggle is justified for this reason. For contemporaries in the ANC and SACP including Mandela, Sharpeville justified a move to armed struggle. It acted as a catalyst which warranted a move away from non-cooperation campaigns. The justification mentioned by Lodge is elaborated on by Mandela during his speech from the dock in the Rivonia trial. Mandela stated that non-violence was the original forms of protest against the apartheid system, and it was only when the government met non-violence with force (Sharpeville) that they too had to use violence.<sup>13</sup> The *Unlawful Organisation Act*, passed as a nationalist reaction to the protests at Sharpeville, allowed the government to ban any organisation that posed a threat to the status quo.<sup>14</sup> It is this

act and the *Suppression of Communism Act* (1950) that Mandela is referring to in his 'I am prepared to die' speech.<sup>15</sup> Since the government has closed off all channels of discussion and refuses to debate, violence must be used to force this door open. This would be achieved through sabotaging railways, power lines and other crucial infrastructure.<sup>16</sup> However, sabotage also acted as a valve of discontent, Mandela argued from the dock. 'Violence by the African people had become inevitable, unless responsible leadership was given to the people... outbreaks of terrorism could lead to civil war'.<sup>17</sup> The reasoning behind a potential civil war is an understandable reason to form MK. Various wars between the British and the Boers had led to a widespread mistrust, particularly among Boer nationalists. A racial war could have turned the struggle to remove apartheid decades back. It would mean an emphasis of 'the other' with an even more intense focus on the differences of the races. The damage this would have done would only strengthen nationalist resolve and ideas of race. Better instead to sabotage infrastructure and create a movement for the people to express their resentment, and this it did as one such photograph shows. Large crowds gathered to support Mandela and the activities of MK after his arrest in 1962 holding cards with phrases such as 'we are proud of our leaders'.<sup>18</sup> Across the country people knew that at least something was being done in an attempt to overthrow the apartheid system.

Nevertheless sabotage was not perfect, as the historian William Beinart states, even acts of sabotage increased nationalist resolve. In a sense it proved to too many

within the Nationalist Party that Africans were not fit to participate in organised politics. However if sabotage is used it was inevitable that some public opinion would be lost within the country, what justifies the use of sabotage was its wider aims, to increase international sympathy and force the government into talks. This is why MK kept to sabotage, instead of the terrorist activity of the PAC's POQO military wing, which did kill civilians.<sup>19</sup> In his speech from the dock Mandela justifies the decision to move to armed struggle, it provided a point of unity for the oppressed, and set about forcing a hostile government to negotiate.

Mandela's speech at the Rivonia trial justified the actions of MK to contemporaries. But recent research by Stephen Ellis has suggested that it was in fact the SACP that initiated this, and it was Mandela, who was a member of both the SACP and ANC who provided the best front man for the movement.<sup>20</sup> While this does not contradict any of the justification given in the 1964 speech it does shed new light onto the formation of MK and its methods. Ellis points out that Mandela, as a lawyer knew that the speech given under dock was not under oath and hence he could skim the truth off his role in the heavily prosecuted SACP. Ellis argues that the speech did not, however, do justice to the role played by SACP and the aid from both the USSR and the People's Republic of China, by 1960 SACP had already contacted Mao. Does this make the Mandela's decision to support armed struggle more justified? In terms of practicality yes, as a more prepared movement is often a more

successful movement.

It is clear now, that as early as the 1950s members of the ANC Youth League had considered adopting armed struggle in the future. Ellis argues that Sisulu and Mandela saw this change in tactics as inevitable.<sup>21</sup> Whether this is the case or not, Sharpeville marked this moment in the future when plans had to be reconsidered. It made sense to make use of these international connections through the communist party when considering a move to an armed struggle. In 1953 Sisulu received money from the Worlds Federation of Democratic Youth, a Soviet backed organisation. This allowed him and other key members of the ANC such as Henry Makgothi to travel overseas in search of international backing.<sup>22</sup> Mandela too, clearly saw the benefit of having communist allies on side and requested that Sisulu raise the question of armed struggle with the help of the Chinese.<sup>23</sup> If an armed struggle had been initiated as early as 1953 it would have been unfounded, the nationalist government had yet to do enough damage to shock the world or deter investors. If an armed struggle had been taken up in the 1950s it is likely that world opinion would turn against the ANC and MK. The central committee of the Chinese communist party, perhaps realising this, told Sisulu that the time was not right.<sup>24</sup> This financial backing and visits to the USSR and People's Republic shows that members of the Youth League clearly were influenced by communist ideals and saw potential allies in the communist states. This only brings up the question regarding why Mandela has since denied allegations of communism evidence to the contrary. With

hindsight it is possible to presume Mandela's motivation behind this. Communism, at the time of the Cold War was viewed negatively by Britain, America, and the South African government. By openly coming out as a communist Mandela would serve only to lose support. It can also be argued that if Mandela had freely admitted to being a member of SACP as well of the ANC the opening of gradual negotiations by the Nationalist Party would not have begun in the 1980s while Mandela was based in Pollsmoor Prison.<sup>25</sup> As Ellis himself has said 'What this shows is that like any politician, he was prepared to make opportunistic alliances'.<sup>26</sup> Mandela's denial of SACP is a political tool that served MK and the ANC for the better. If Mandela is still reluctant to admit his membership in SACP today, perhaps this is because even now, he cannot bring himself to openly lie about his affiliations. It is unlikely Mandela was a true convert to the full ideals of communism, he wrote in his autobiography 'There will always be those who say that the Communists were using us, but who is to say we were not using them?'<sup>27</sup>

Successful Anti-colonial movements and potential communist support around the world in the 1950s and 1960s showed what was possible and inspired many in the both the ANC and SACP that now was the ideal time to take up arms.<sup>28</sup> In Algeria nationalists were successfully fighting the French, and in 1957 Ghana became the first independent country on the African continent.<sup>29</sup> The veteran secretary of SACP and member of the ANC Moses Kotane met some of the world's

International support on the left was certainly present if the ANC decided on an armed struggle. Of particular significance to members in both SACP and the ANC was training and advice from the People's Republic of China. In the post-revolutionary years Mao Tse-tung had expressed sympathy towards the causes of the ANC.<sup>31</sup> As the communist parties' position became more secure the People's Republic provided substantial support for foreign revolutionary movements. After the events of Sharpeville, military training in a friendly China strengthened the skills of MK. In his autobiography Raymond Mhlaba writes how in 1961 the central committee of the ANC sent him a coded message, instructing him to begin military training abroad.<sup>32</sup> Mhlaba writes of some of the skills he and other members of MK learned in China, 'we received special training in Guerrilla warfare... The Chinese taught us hit-and-run techniques.. and how to manufacture indigenous weapons'.<sup>33</sup> Anti-colonial movements and support from the anti-colonial left, particularly from Mao, justified the move to armed struggle further. Sisulu and Mandela both intended to make use of this alliance to create a stronger well trained MK. In a global context the 1960s were an ideal time to launch MK because of the training opportunities and foreign support.

It has been established that a joint SACP and ANC armed struggle would be far more fruitful than individual organisations. But why was Mandela chosen as the figurehead for this joint struggle? It is likely that Mandela had joined SACP at some point between the 1950s and 1960s and was soon promoted onto the central committee.<sup>34</sup> At

members within the ANC who would know of Mandela's 'dual allegiance' would be other senior black communists who also held positions within the ANC.<sup>35</sup> The police often suspected Mandela of being an 'evil' communist, yet they were never able to prove this. SACP knew that the government remained close to dialogue. The cold war mentality and prevention of a 'communist revolution' were the motivations behind both the *Suppression of Communism Act* and the *Unlawful Organisation Act*. An independent resistance movement from SACP would have failed to open talks with the Nationalist Party, this would be too much a loss of face on their part. SACP would also have failed to receive support from America and its allies currently participating in the Cold War. Mandela then, could be used as a man to represent the struggle in the best possible light to the public, he was known as an ANC man. Mandela's role between SACP and the ANC went deeper still, someone had to convince Chief Luthuli the head of the ANC to come round to sabotage as a means to begin negotiations. This was crucial as if SACP took up an armed struggle independently it would fail to generate global support. What is clear is that SACP took the decision to move to an armed struggle first, and it was the ANC that followed, Mandela provided the bridge between the two organisations.<sup>36</sup>

To truly make the armed struggle worthwhile and justified, the ANC and SACP had to agree on terms. Chief Luthuli head of the ANC however was

have little success and led to little real change. S.E Couper has said that this difference between Luthuli and older members of the congress, and the radical ideals of the young, created a gulf in the ANC. This would eventually lead to Luthuli himself being marginalised.<sup>37</sup> Couper states that Luthuli's 'embarrassingly persistent espousal of non-violent methods' that led to his marginalisation within the ANC.<sup>38</sup> By 1961 Mandela and Luthuli had come to an agreement, that is that MK would act Independently of the ANC, which would still advocate views of non- violence.<sup>39</sup> This was a reasonable move by Luthuli and Mandela at the time, it allowed the ANC to carry on true to its foundations and allowed MK to attack the regime through sabotage. This partial splitting off between MK and the ANC avoided a complete schism within the congress, preventing another PAC organisation from forming. While it was the best solution at the time it was by no means perfect. Luthuli continued writing columns in *The Golden Post* arguing against violence as a method of change, even after he had agreed to the initiation of MK.<sup>40</sup> While this did make contemporaries uncomfortable (through contradictions) it prevented a schism in the Congress, while allowing the ANC and SACP to form a solid sabotage movement. Mandela's decision to act as a bridge between both the ANC and SACP and Luthuli's decision to allow MK to exist as a separate organisation were justified actions. It laid the formations for a solid movement without significantly weakening the ANC.

If we examine the options open to Mandela after the Sharpeville massacre, it

was justified. Sharpeville had shown that peaceful protest could lead to deaths, and that it was not worth risking hundreds or thousands of lives in an attempt to get the government to negotiate. At the time this seemed hopeless as the government passed acts to ban all organisations that questioned the apartheid system. A campaign of sabotage seemed the most viable option to force the government into reassessing the law. It was hoped that this would also turn global opinion against the Nationalist Party, making them even more in need of a compromise. The conditions globally also justified Mandela's decision to support MK. Internationally it seemed to be a time of the death of the old colonial regimes, support and training from both the USSR and People's Republic would also mean a more skilled knowledgeable movement. Mandela was able to use his positions in both SACP and the ANC to act as a bridge between the two organisations, and successfully convinced Luthuli that an armed struggle was justified, avoiding a deeply fragmented and divided ANC. For these reasons, Mandela's decision to support armed struggle was justified. Mandela and MK managed to skilfully encourage western support while also receiving support from both the USSR and China in a Cold war world. Mandela's persona and connections clearly made him the ideal man to lead and represent Umkhonto we Sizwe.

## Notes

1. Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Longman Higher Education, 1983), p. 14.
2. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk To Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Abacus, 1995), p. 205.
3. Ibid, p. 20.
4. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 6.
5. Peter Parker, *In the Shadow of Sharpeville: Apartheid and Criminal Justice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 11.
6. Ibid, p. 11.
7. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 7.
8. Johns Sheridan and R. Hunt Davis, *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress: The Struggle against Apartheid, 1948-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 9.
9. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 207.
10. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 15.
11. Ibid, p. 14.
12. Alfred Draper, *The Amritsar Massacre: Twilight of the Raj* (Buchan & Enright, 1986) p. 88.
13. Nelson Mandela, *In His Own Words: From Freedom to the Future* (London: Abacus, 2004), p.28.
14. *South Africa: Time Running Out: The Report of the Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa* (University of California Press, 1981), p. 73.
15. Ibid, p. 73.
16. Sheridan, and Davis, *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress*, p. 87.
17. Nelson Mandela, *In His Own Words: From Freedom to the Future* (Abacus, 2004), p.28.
18. Christina Scott, *Nelson Mandela: A Force for Freedom* (Sevenoaks, 2010), p. 76.
19. William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, (OPUS, 2001), p. 228.
20. Stephen Ellis, "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961," *Journal of southern African Studies* (2011), p. 657.
21. Ibid, p. 660.
22. Ibid, p. 669.
23. Ibid, p. 667.
24. Ibid, p. 659.

Notes

24. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 452.
25. (Freeman 8/12/2012)
26. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 452.
27. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p. 168.
28. Ellis, "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle", p. 660.
29. Ibid, p. 660.
30. Ian Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* (T & F Books, 2009) p.19.
31. Raymond Mhalaba, *Raymond Mhlaba's Personal Memoirs* (HSRC Press, 2001) p. 112.
32. Ibid, p. 115.
33. Ellis, "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle", p. 667
34. Ibid, p. 666.

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