

THE UGLY RESIDUE OF SLAVERY

September 2019

For all these years it never once occurred to me, as I added sugar to my morning coffee, that I was unwittingly participating in the ugly residue of slavery. Sugar - that alluring sweet boost to the day: sugar - that dangerous threat to health: sugar - that essential ingredient in the Atlantic triangular slave trade. What?!

To whit - merchants purchased raw sugar from plantations in the Caribbean and shipped it to New England and Europe, where it was sold to distillery companies that produced rum. Profits from the sale of sugar were used to produce rum, furs, and lumber in New England which was shipped to Europe. Profits from European sales were used to purchase manufactured goods, including tools and weapons, which were shipped, along with sugar and rum, to West Africa where they were bartered for slaves. The slaves were taken to the Caribbean to be sold to sugar planters. The profits were used to buy more sugar, thus restarting the cycle. The Mark Anthony DeWolf Family of Bristol, RI, owned, over the generations, 47 ships that transported thousands of chained Africans across the Middle Passage into Slavery. Descendent James DeWolf was a US Senator for RI. The family's slave trading (and there were others) didn't end until 1820.

A bit of the North Kingstown history: Kings Towne was founded in 1674 by the colonial government in much of the Narragansett country, in what would become the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, which is the name of the state still. Efforts to remove the reference to plantations were defeated in a Constitutional vote in 2010. In the 1790 Census the population of North Kingstown was 2,907. That census shows that there were 63 enslaved people, "owned" by 25 families. William Hamilton, Esq, "owned" 7 enslaved people, as did John Hazard.

OK, so what's my point? Simply this. The ugly residue of slavery is with us still, even to my enjoying sugar in my coffee.

August 2019 is the 400th Anniversary of the arrival more than 20 enslaved Africans near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the British colony of Virginia. 600,000 more were brought to these shores. The census of 1860 showed a population of 3,953,761 enslaved persons. Note: I will no longer use the word 'slave' - it defines a human being as someone else's 'property.' Each one is a person who has been enslaved by another person, for personal gain or other purposes!

This brief essay was triggered by "The 1619 Project," an effort by the New York Times to tell a story that is either unknown, ignored, or dismissed. And, predictably, there are already those who are dismissing the project as a "left wing conspiracy." The 1619 Project is an effort to place ... "the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are."

If you are sick of the racist rhetoric that is coming from the highest places in our government, or if you are tired of the subtle racism that creeps into our souls, it is a 'must read.' Significant wealth was created on the backs of enslaved peoples who did not participate in its benefits. Privilege was gained by some who are not even aware that we are privileged. The descendants of enslaved persons are blamed for things they did not do, are suspects before the facts are known, are trapped in generations of poverty that was thrust upon them, are denied opportunities because their ancestors were denied

opportunity, are hindered in voting lest they gain some control over their own destiny. It was wrong, and it is wrong. It was immoral, and it is immoral. It was sinful, and it is sinful.

The way to dealing with the ugly residue of slavery is to know its roots, and recognize its consequences in our midst. If we cannot do that, how can a people dedicated to the proposition that all persons are created equal long endure. If we cannot do that, how can we stand before our Maker. When some people are made into 'the least of these,' there are consequences for our soul. It's that simple. It's that hard.