

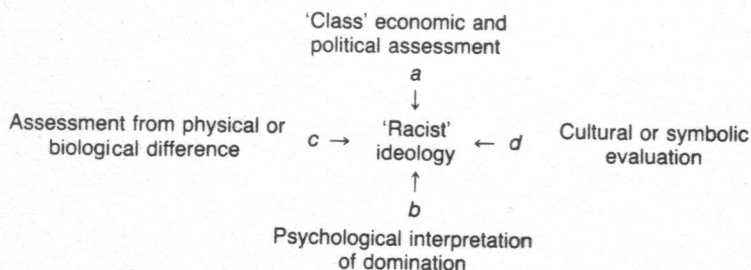
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A Report on the Situation in Latin America

I PROPOSE to deal here with racism as discrimination against the African slaves, not against the native Indians.¹ A brief remark first about some of the postulates used. There is a school of 'economicism' which would see class economic domination as the sole cause of racism (assessment *a* in the diagram below). On the other hand, there exists a 'subjectivist psychologism' which denies any possibility of considering the problem if one has not first suffered humiliation 'in one's own skin' (assessment *b*). Then there is the classic 'biological racism' which seeks to define the cause of racism as the natural or physical differences between individuals of different races, with the supposition that one race is genetically superior to another (assessment *c*). Finally, there are those who adopt a 'cultural' viewpoint and see everything being played out on the level of symbols, in cultural traditions, dance and song (assessment *d*). In fact the problem of racist domination operates on all these levels, once one understands that its chief characteristic is a part of *ideological* development.

Diagram 1

The 'practical circle' of racist ideology



The struggle against racist domination therefore needs to take account of all these levels. A theology of liberation of the Black population of Latin America should also take account of all the different assessments if it is not to be left working from a partial standpoint.

1. HISTORICAL CLASS ASSESSMENT²

The Portuguese discovery of the route to India in the fifteenth century and the conquest of America by the Spaniards and Portuguese led to the decline of the Arab commercial world (since that route was no longer the only one open to world trade), and to a crisis in all the kingdoms of the Savannah countries (as a result of Arab decline), mainly because Europe now sought its gold in America.³ This explains why communities such as the Soninke, Sosso, Mandingas, Sourhay, Haoussa, Bornu, etc., which were divided into ruling and ruled classes, began to engage in the *sale* of their African brothers on the West Coast of Africa, in order to produce a continuing level of commercial profit. The Portuguese, the English, the Dutch and the French all became involved in the dreadful slave trade from Africa to tropical Latin America, which led to an agriculture on the 'plantations' dedicated to the growing of cash crops for export: sugar, cocoa, cotton, etc. And in Latin America a 'slave-based patriarchal Catholicism' appeared.⁴

Although the Spanish crown had banned Jews, Moors, 'new Christians' and *negroes* from going to the West Indies, the latter were already common in Santo Domingo by 1505. The 'sugar cycle', lasting till 1520, started there, and the sugar mills were populated with African slaves. 'All work linked to the land was carried out by African slaves. The slave population of Melchor de Torres reached 900. By 1548 the number of mills and mines had reached thirty-five.'⁵

E. Genovese has proved that the production systems operative in the plantations were not anti-capitalist, though it must be recognised that the English and Dutch slave-owning bourgeoisie in the Caribbean developed a more modern and truly capitalist system than the Spanish—even than the most developed of the Spanish societies, the slave-owning middle-classes in Cuba. 'Slavery should be seen primarily as a *class* question, and only secondarily as a racial question.'⁶ Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz points to the same conclusion: 'Negroes were first and foremost capital goods, and their importation was governed by the rules of commerce and the stimulus of trade.'⁷ Of course the system was not the same in the case of the patriarchal paternalism of the mill owner of North-East Brazil as in that of the English capitalist who lived in London and owned 'plantations' in Jamaica, Trinidad or Guyana. But the fact is that Latin America had a slave population.

As early as 1513 the Spanish king gave the first licence to charge two ducats for each African slave sold. By 1578 this had risen to thirty ducats. The Africans were treated monstrously, not only by the human hunt in Africa and the inhuman passage across the Atlantic—during which up to 30 per cent died—but equally by the 'palming' (measuring height and therefore price) and branding (with a hot iron on the back, chest or thigh, to show that the tax had been paid) to which they were subjected once they arrived at the ports of Cartagena, Vera Cruz, Bahía, Río, Pernambuco, etc.

Besides the Caribbean and Brazil, the whole of northern South America (Venezuela and Colombia) and the Pacific coast down to Guayaquil had a Black majority. In Mexico, Central America, Peru and the River Plate district, Black slaves were used as domestic servants or *Majordomos* in charge of Indians. Whatever use they were put to, the basic reason for their presence in Latin America was mercantile capitalism.

2. THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN LATIN AMERICA

One factor was the work *Instauranda Aethiopum Salute* written by Alonso de Sandóval, SJ, at the end of the seventeenth century. (He taught St Peter Claver, the apostle of the slaves, in Cartagena.) Another was the formation of slave and negro confraternities in the colonial period. Another the endless revolts by Africans—in Haïti

Table 1

Total importation of slaves to America from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries (from Curtin, p. 178). Figures in thousands.

Region or nation	1451-1600	1601-1700	1701-1800	1811-1870	Total
United States	—	—	348.0	51.0	399.0
Latin America	75.0	292.5	578.6	606.0	1,552.1
British Caribbean	—	263.7	1,401.3	—	1,665.0
Jamaica	—	85.1	662.4	—	747.5
Barbados	—	134.5	252.5	—	387.0
Leeward Islands, St Lucia, Tobago, etc.	—	44.1	371.9	—	416.1
Trinidad	—	—	22.4	—	22.4
Grenada	—	—	67.0	—	67.0
Other British West Indies	—	—	25.0	—	25.0
French Caribbean	—	155.8	1,348.4	96.0	1,600.2
Haiti	—	74.6	789.7	—	864.3
Martinique	—	66.5	258.3	41.0	365.8
Gaudelupe	—	12.7	237.1	41.0	290.8
Louisiana	—	—	28.3	—	28.3
French Guyana	—	2.0	35.0	14.0	51.0
Dutch Caribbean	—	40.0	460.0	—	500.0
Danish Caribbean	—	4.0	24.0	—	28.0
Brazil	50.0	560.0	1,891.4	1,145.4	3,646.8
Rest of the World	149.9	25.1	—	—	175.0
Europe	48.8	1.2	—	—	50.0
São Tomé	76.1	23.9	—	—	100.0
Atlantic Isles	25.0	—	—	—	25.0
TOTAL	274.9	1,341.1	6,051.7	1,898.4	9,566.1
Annual quota	1.8	13.4	55.0	31.6	22.8

alone in 1522, 1679 and 1691; in Santo Domingo in 1523, 1537, 1548, etc.; in the British Antilles in 1647, 1674, 1702, 1733 and 1759; few as impressive as the establishment of a real State in the 'shanty-town' of Los Palmares in Brazil, in which the hero Zumbi Gangozuma was killed in 1695. A major factor was the way the Black leader and liberator of Haiti, Toussaint Louverture, showed the world that negroes could be political leaders and rulers. But as a matter of historical fact, the abolition of slavery was chiefly due to the growth of industrial capitalism. While mercantile capitalism needed slaves in order to export tropical products, industrial capitalism needed *free* workers whose labour it could buy for wages. This does not mean that a class-based racism did not carry on in the capitalist system, but industrial capitalism was incompatible with the slavery of the plantations.

So, 'the abolition of the slave trade was declared by the Supreme Court of Caracas in 1810, by Hidalgo in Mexico in the same year, by the Chilean Parliament in 1811 and by the Government in Buenos Aires in 1812'.⁸

For the same reasons that led to the victory of the northern states over the 'old South' of the plantations based on patriarchal slave-owning in the American Civil War, the São Paulo coffee magnates in Brazil (1870-80) destroyed the aristocratic slave owners of the North-East of the country with the law *Lei aurea* of 13 May 1888, which signalled the abolition of slavery and the triumph of the capitalism (though dependent) of the South.

While slavery disappeared from Latin America in the nineteenth century, 'racism' as a *class ideology* discriminating against the manual labourer, the worker, the

marginalised Blacks, did not. In Latin American countries with a large Black population, racism is still a living, active, real social injustice.

3. THE BLACK PRESENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

The importance of this question can be seen from the fact that by the end of this century Brazil alone will have a Black and mulatto population of 80 million, making it perhaps the country with the largest negro population in the world. The survival of African customs and religions is everywhere obvious—Bantu, Fanti-ashanti, Black Islam, Calabar and Yoruba with its famous *Orishas*.⁹ The most relevant forms of creative expression are the Voodoo of Haïti and the *candomblé* of north-eastern Brazil, with their own spirits, gods, saints, cosmologies, liturgies and dances, ecstasies, ways of life and popular communities. Piling one form of syncretism on another, they show traits of African religions, Catholicism and even Protestantism, together with spiritualism and magic. Athur Ramos defines *macumba*—another African cult in Brazil—as a mixture of *gégé* (Fon), *nago* (Yoruba), *musulmi* (Black Islam), Bantu, *camboclé* (Indian), spiritualism and Catholicism.

All such cults derive from three main traditions: genuine African (survivals such as the Bantu 'sacred dances'); negro folklore originating in the plantations of America (through a process of 'creole-ising', like the stories of 'Papa John' who deceives his master, through which the slaves affirmed their own personalities and laughed at their masters); and finally, the whole sphere of the infiltration of Black culture into the dominant white culture, through symbols, music or effective participation by Blacks in the white way of life.

In recent decades a new political situation for the Blacks in Latin America has begun to emerge. This has happened mainly in the Caribbean, with revolutionary leaders; in

Table 2

The Negro and Mulatto population of Latin America in 1940 (with percentage of the total population of each country)

Country	Negroes	%	Mulattoes	%
Brazil	5,789,924	14.0	8,276,321	20.01
Antilles	5,500,000	39.29	3,000,000	21.43
British Guyana	100,000	29.30	80,000	23.44
Dutch Guyana	17,000	9.55	20,000	11.23
French Guyana	1,000	0.25	1,000	0.25
Belize	15,000	25.55	20,000	34.03
Colombia	405,076	4.5	2,205,382	24.32
Venezuela	100,000	2.79	1,000,000	27.93
Nicaragua	90,000	6.52	40,000	2.88
Honduras	55,272	4.99	10,000	0.90
El Salvador	100	0.0001	100	0.0001
Costa Rica	26,900	4.09	20,000	3.14
Guatemala	4,011	0.12	2,000	0.06
Mexico	80,000	0.41	40,000	2.04
Ecuador	50,000	2.0	150,000	6.0
Peru	29,054	0.41	80,000	0.71
Bolivia	7,800	0.26	5,000	0.15
Paraguay	5,000	0.52	5,000	0.52
Uruguay	10,000	0.46	50,000	2.30
Argentina	5,000	0.038	10,000	0.076
Chile	1,000	0.02	3,000	0.06

the Mosquitia region of Nicaragua, and even through the presence of Cuban negro soldiers in wars of liberation in Africa itself. Could the Africans who left those shores as slaves in the past produce today the liberators of their brothers in their continent of origin? History has long and mysterious ways which must be explored and deciphered.

As can be seen, the negro population is concentrated in tropical produce regions, the old 'plantations': the Brazilian coastal region, the Caribbean and the Pacific coast from southern Paraguay to Ecuador.

4. RACISM AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA

The question of racism poses a challenge to liberation theology in its growth process. Domination of one *nation* by another (understood through the theory of dependence), of one *class* by another (where sociological considerations and those of political economy are at stake), of one *sex* by another (where Freudian categories must be taken into account), is not of the same order as domination of one *race* by another, which involves a multi-level complex of economic, political, psychological, cultural and symbolic, ideological and other factors. Theology has to deal with liberation from all these dominations epistemologically, taking account of the differences between each. The erotic-subjective factor is one thing, the economic-objective another, the symbolic-cultural yet another. Ideology cannot be set aside, either, but needs to be situated on the level of its relative autonomy and so assessed in relation to the other factors.

I have said that industrial capitalism was the basic cause of the freeing of the slaves in the plantation system. Yet German national capitalism (the Krupps and Thyssens, who are never mentioned nowadays but who were responsible for Hitler) has in our century been the economic and political starting-point for anti-Jewish racist ideology. So capitalism is at one time anti-slavery and at another anti-Jewish racist (in order to eliminate international Jewish capital from Germany). In relation to the negroes, capitalism uses colour difference as an ideological tool in the domination of the middle class over the working class—the urban proletariat, since in Latin America the negroes are rarely peasants.

The theological *sin* of racism takes on connotations of economic and political domination, psychological domination (the sadistic aggressiveness of the dominator, the masochistic passivity of the dominated), symbolic domination (the devil is Black, like sin), and ideological domination as such (the negro race is inferior). This is why Boesak's 'the courage to be'¹⁰ is immensely important. Not only as negation of the negation involved in oppression, but also as affirmation of Black, African actuality, the dignity of being a *historic people* with its own traditions, heroes, art and religion.

All this has to be linked explicitly to the question of the *oppressed class* in Latin America's system of dependent capitalism. The Black struggle for liberation is a struggle for the affirmation of *negritude* within a national project of liberation, together with other oppressed races, and aiming at a socialist system for Latin America. Without this strategic socio-political focus, liberation of the race can become an absolute, a 'reformism', leading in the end to a dissolution of its efforts and an attack on the wrong enemies. These are not 'whites' as such but the whites who dominate the capitalist system. To regard any white as an enemy for the simple fact of being white is to fail to distinguish which whites use racism for their own advantage, and, at the same time to alienate white allies who are also *oppressed* by those who dominate both white and black. Theology cannot bypass such questions; if it does, it could become populist or reformist and cease to be liberation theology properly so-called.¹¹

Notes

1. I have given a partial treatment of this question in 'Modern Christianity in the face of "the other"' in *Concilium* 130 (10/1979) 49.

2. The following is a classified bibliography of the question:

(i) *Latin America in general:*

J. Saco *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza negra en el Nuevo Mundo* (Havana 1938); E. Vila Vilar *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos* (Seville 1977); R. Mellafe *Breve historia de la esclavitud negra en América Latina* (Mexico 1973); L. Rout *The African Experience in Spanish America: 1502 to the Present* (Cambridge 1976); F. Knight *The African Dimension in Latin American Societies* (New York 1974); L. Fonor *Slavery in the New World* (Englewood Cliffs 1969); J. Gratus 'The Great White Lie: slavery, emancipation and changing racial attitudes' in *Monthly Review* (New York 1973).

(ii) *Particular areas*

(a) *Brazil:*

F. Cardoso *Capitalismo e escravidão no Brasil meridional* (São Paulo 1977); R. Conrad *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery* (Berkeley 1972); P. Verger *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahía de Todos os Santos* (Paris 1968).

(b) *The Caribbean:*

J. Handler *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore 1974); H. Aimes *A History of Slavery in Cuba: 1511-1968* (New York 1970); V. J. Baptiste *Haïti: sa lutte pour l'émancipation* (Paris 1957); O. Patterson *The Sociology of Slavery in Jamaica* (Jamaica 1973); L. Díaz Soler *La esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* (San Juan 1957); G. Martin *Histoire de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Paris 1948); J. Fouchard *Les Marrons de la liberté* (Paris 1972).

(c) *Mexico:*

G. Aguirre *La población negra de México 1519-1910* (Mexico 1946); R. Brady *The Emergence of a Negro Class in Mexico 1524-1640* (Iowa 1965).

(d) *Central America:*

W. Sherman *Forced Native Labor in XVI-century Central America* (London 1979); S. Zavala *Contribución a la historia de las instituciones coloniales de Guatemala* (Guatemala 1953); L. Díez Castillo *Los cimarrones y la esclavitud en Panamá* (Panama 1968).

(e) *Colombia and Venezuela:*

A. Escalante *El negro en Colombia* (Bogotá 1968); J. Palacios *La trata de negros por Cartagena 1650-1750* (Tunja 1973); M. Acosta *Vida de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (Caracas 1966); E. Tronconis *Documentos para el estudio de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (Caracas 1969).

(f) *The Southern Tip:*

R. E. Chace *The African Impact on Colonial Argentina* (Santa Barbara 1969); C. Sempat *El tráfico de esclavos en Córdoba 1588-1610* (Córdoba 1965); E. Scheuss de Studer *La trata de negros en el Río de la Plata en el siglo XVIII* (Buenos Aires 1958); G. Cruz *La abolición de la esclavitud en Chile* (Santiago 1942); C. Rama *Los agro-uruguayos* (Montevideo 1967).

(g) *Peru:*

F. Bowser *The African Slave in Colonial Peru 1524-1650* (Stamford 1974).

3. See F. Braudel 'De l'or du Soudan à l'argent d'amérique' in *Annales E.S.C.* (Paris¹ 1946) 1-22.
4. See G. Freyre *Casa grande e senzala* (Rio¹⁸ 1979).
5. F. Moya Pons *Historia Colonial de Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo 1974) p. 71ff.
6. See E. Genovese *Esclavitud y capitalismo* (Barcelona 1971).
7. *La población en América latina* (Madrid 1973) p. 93; see P. Curtin *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Madison 1975).
8. R. Mellafe in the work cited in note 2, pp. 141ff; see E. E. Williams *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York 1944).
9. See R. Bastide *Las Américas negras* (Madrid 1967) pp. 121-207.
10. See A. Boesak *Farewell to Innocence* (New York 1977).
11. These questions were discussed at a seminar held in Kingston, Jamaica in December 1979.