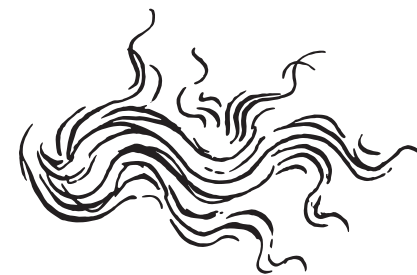


CULTURE AND POLITICS

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*Accept the truth from
whoever utters it.*

MAIMONIDES

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HOLLY BREWER

Race and Enlightenment: The Story of a Slander



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In 1945, Columbia University published an obscure treatise by Jean Bodin, which originally appeared in 1566, as part of its “Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies” series. Bodin was a theorist of absolutism, but one who had a profound influence on later natural rights thinkers, and this was his first work, translated from Latin by Beatrice Reynolds. Scholars across Europe and the United States were busy for over more than two centuries, but especially after World War II, collecting and publishing works that they deemed crucial to “civilization.” They sought works that would aid students in understanding and furthering modernity, defined as democracy

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and human rights, enlightenment, and the scientific method, as well as capitalism. As they sought significant works that would contribute to furthering “civilization” in the present by understanding its past — a kind of scholarly uplift for society — they omitted from their assembled record works that did not fit present desires. Ancient, medieval, and modern works that were not a useful past for liberal modernity were ignored — not revived, not translated, not reprinted, not quoted, not read, not taught. It was thus that they created a modern canon that revolved around and vindicated the issues that they themselves cared about.

In the years after World War II, it was increasingly the Enlightenment that garnered such attention, the one that featured John Locke and other theorists of democracy and republics, modern science, and modern economics. As American universities flourished and expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, and efforts to promote human rights and democracy around the world expanded under the auspices of the United Nations, Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, for example, was translated into many different languages. Scholarship on Rousseau and Adam Smith, among many others, flourished. But there was a problem. The Enlightenment occurred in a period of the expansion not merely of rights, but also of European empires, of slavery and subjugation. How should we explain such inequalities? How can all these historical realities be reconciled?

Many scholars and critics, starting in the late 1960s with David Brion Davis in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Thought* and Winthrop Jordan in *White over Black*, and later blossoming in works such as Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom*, sought answers to this paradox. And in seeking those answers, they consulted the same sources already so

carefully selected to create the modern canons. They looked to the sources that had been chosen and compiled to represent civilization and modernity, so as to understand the origins of the subjugation, racism, and slavery as well as their supposed opposites.

It makes sense, after all. As they went through college and graduate school, those were the texts they read, and were now reading more critically. Of course, they added other sources: as greater access to more documents became available, they read more widely. Edmund Morgan once told me that his research method was to read all books published in the mainland colonies, in chronological order, as they were reproduced in the microfiche database Early American Imprints. And in the decades that followed, as post-colonial theorists built on that critical foundation, their attention has remained on that same canon, on the classics already singled out. It is a bit like the problem that police detectives describe, of the man who loses his wallet at night. Some part of the street is lit up by a street-light, and it is easiest, even instinctual, to look there. But that might not be the best place to look.

In that spirit I choose to focus here on the distasteful and the repulsive, on ideas and texts that we should not be teaching or reading, except in context. These are to be found in books and pamphlets that have been excised, on moral grounds, from our uplifting collections about civilization and enlightenment. They propound racist ideas that appear in works that we usually ignore. I have in mind a very particular and repugnant debate, mainly in the seventeenth century, over whether African women had sex (and children) with monkeys, and whether Africans were therefore of a different species and should be seen as bestial or monstrous. It is an ugly chapter in our intellectual history, but we have a lot to learn from it. I was

led down this path because the streetlight did not illuminate all the answers.



My adventure began with the broad claims made by Ibram X. Kendi in his widely read book, *Stamped from the Beginning*, which, building on earlier post-colonial scholars of “whiteness,” attributed the origins of the repulsive racist idea that I have just described to the Enlightenment, and particularly to Locke’s foundational treatise *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which appeared in 1690. The term “essay” does it no justice: it is a long and dense philosophical work, published in four books, that, for all intents and purposes, was one of the most widely read treatises of not only Britain’s enlightenment, but also all of Europe’s. Its insistence on ways of knowing, its exploration of how humans come to understand truth and to repudiate falsehood, it provided the definition for individual as well as group “enlightenment.” Paired with Locke’s theories of government, it helped to explain how human beings can and should make their own judgments about government (instead of accepting divinely chosen monarchs). I had read *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* comprehensively, and Kendi’s discussion of it clashed with my remembered reading. I had pondered every page for questions of race and racism. How had I missed what Kendi had found? Thus began my journey down a nasty rabbit hole, one that has led me to think more deeply about canons and sources of civilization, and to explore more deeply today’s fierce debates about the connections between racism, slavery, and democracy in America’s (and Britain’s) history.

In Kendi’s reading, as in much recent scholarship, the

Enlightenment was anything but enlightened. It embodied whiteness and privilege. Its scientific theories created racism. It legitimated slavery. Slavery, in the contemporary “anti-racist” account, emerged in each of England’s thirteen colonies in the Americas as a result of relatively unified (and relatively democratic) support among whites. My point here is not to belabor the realities of racism in early America: on that I think we are all agreed. But I do want to challenge an assumption about its pervasiveness, and where it came from, and especially the idea that it was “stamped” from the beginning. From my study of these sources (and many others) I would argue instead that it was contested from the beginning, and that it changed over time and varied by place.

I suggest that maintaining our focus on the works and the authors whom historians in the past identified as progressive helps to conceal a more complex, and more interesting, debate over principles of privilege and power, over racism and inclusion, a debate fiercely fought on many levels in early modern England and its colonies, even as they went through three revolutions over those centuries. Racism and slavery were not isolated from those struggles, but part of larger contests over power. Many scholars and thinkers whom we now identify with the Enlightenment were in fact pushing back against slavery and racism as well as the larger structure of power that had mainly promoted them.

Kendi’s analysis of four hundred years of American history in *Stamped from the Beginning* sorted thinkers into racist, neutral, and anti-racist. He consigned Locke to the racist camp.

Locke also touched on the Origin of Species in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Apes, whether “these be all *Men*, or no, all of human *Species*,” depended

on one's "definition of the word *Man*," because, he said, "if History lie not," then West African Women had conceived babies with apes. Locke thus reinforced African female hypersexuality in a passage sent round the English-speaking world. "And what real *Species*, by that measure, such a Production will be in Nature, will be a new Question." Locke's new "Question" reflected another new racist debate that most debaters feared to engage in publicly. Assimilationists argued monogenesis: that all humans were one species descended from a single human creation... Segregationists argued polygenesis.

Kendi placed Locke squarely in the ranks of the most racist thinkers, acknowledging that while an obscure Italian thinker named Lucilio Vanini might have broached the repulsive idea in 1616, Locke was the first to popularize it in English. This is a grave charge, and it is somewhat difficult to challenge since Kendi provided no footnotes to the passage that he cited from Locke.

Who was Locke responding to? Kendi says Locke was repeating Vanini, an arcane Italian philosopher of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who seems to have been both a theologian and a freethinker, and an early proponent of biological evolution. It is true that there were some Italian claims about this issue beginning in 1618, and a few even earlier, but in fact the idea was "popularized" by another Englishman, Thomas Herbert, in 1664. And Herbert did much more than popularize this racist canard about black bestiality. He claimed to have observed it! Locke, as we shall see, was actually trying to *refute* such claims.

Making sense of them requires beginning with Jean Bodin's *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, the work

that was translated and included in the history of civilization series at Columbia in 1945. First published in 1566, Bodin's book appeared in the midst of debates all over Europe about the justice of colonization and over the best forms and practices of government, and amid speculations about all the different peoples that European explorers and colonizers were encountering and describing. Bodin sought laws of human behavior, and he claimed that the Roman historian Tacitus had argued, in an instance of such a law, that people who live in hot climates were more lustful, a conclusion that he validates by basing it on the medical theory of the humors. Bodin then wrote, claiming to be following Tacitus, that "because self-control" for "southerners" in hot climates "was difficult, particularly when plunging into lust, they gave themselves over to horrible excesses. Promiscuous coition of men and animals took place, wherefore the regions of Africa produce for us so many monsters." Bodin thus maintained, in a single sentence, following an ancient authority, that in Africa human bestiality led to non-human progeny. But his sensational claim was buried deep in a Latin text that was available only to a few scholars. And it appeared on a page full of outlandish claims made by ancient authorities: Caesar's assertion, for example, that "Britons have twelve wives in common and that brothers cohabit with sisters."

In the early seventeenth century, there were a handful of brief references in European sources to the possibility of interspecies sexuality between people and monkeys, but it is always described that way (as between humans and animals), and it was always treated as a rumor, and in no more than a passing remark. So, for example, the Portuguese explorer André Donelha referred to rumors that he heard about sex between monkeys and women in his book describing his

travel to western Africa in 1625. “They say” he wrote, that if a male monkey “meets a woman alone, it makes a match with her.” Donelha said nothing more about it, and he included that brief sentence at the end of a long discussion about monkeys, not people. There was no mention of any progeny of such unions. It does not appear that Donelha’s book (or Vanini’s or Bodin’s) was widely read, except perhaps by a few scholars, though the rumors were being repeated.



It was only after the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England that the claims became anything more than rumors, and the effort to proliferate this dehumanizing allegation seems to have been deliberate, emerging in tandem with the English crown’s efforts to become formally involved in the slave trade. Such efforts began mere months after the restoration, and centered on the efforts of the King’s brother James, the Duke of York, who would later brag that the Royal African Company was his idea. England had an earlier company with monopoly rights to trade in Africa, known as the Guinea Company, but no real territorial claims and no fortifications in Africa before 1660. Initially called the Royal Adventurers into Africa, the Royal African Company was its nickname almost from the start. On October 3, 1660, Samuel Pepys recorded in his journal “I heard the Duke [of York] speak of a great design that he and my Lord of Pembroke [Philip Herbert, fifth Earl of Pembroke] have, and a great many others, of sending a venture to some parts of Africa.” James convened the first meeting to plan for a Royal African Company that would organize and provide military support for English trade with Africa later that month. One of his biographers noted that while many

at the time reported that James supported trade generally, in practice he was actively involved only in the Americas and Africa. While the public talk was of gold, which was indeed a part of the plan, the private discussion included, from the first, slavery.

A part of what Charles and James were promoting in their policies was explicitly racist. Given that all publications had to gain the royal imprimatur to be published, it is subtly revealing to consider what the censors approved. One of the books which earned their approbation was an important work by Thomas Herbert, cousin to Philip Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, which went through three editions between 1664 and 1677. Significantly, Herbert was cousin to the Earl of Pembroke, who, as Pepys reported, was one of the primary planners of the Royal African Company, and Pembroke was Herbert’s sponsor in court. Herbert was also popular in court circles because he claimed to have protected Charles I at the end of his life, such that Charles II knighted him in 1660.

In the 1620s Herbert had traveled along the coast of Africa in the delegation of the English Ambassador to Persia. In 1634 and 1637, he published two identical accounts of his travels, which had a substantial section on Africa. The account was racist in its portrayals, but at first he used relatively generic words about savagery and, as the historian Jennifer Morgan has pointed out, added a claim that African women nursed their children by swinging one of their breasts over their shoulder, a claim that makes them seem less than human.

But what Herbert added in 1664 was far worse. He claimed to have witnessed, with his own eyes, African women having sex with apes, and that they were bestial and belonged to a separate non-human species. His discussion went on for many pages. Of Africans, he wrote that

Their language is rather apishly than articulately sounded, with whom 'tis thought they have unnatural mixture... having a voice 'twixt humane and beast, makes that supposition to be of more credit, that they have a beastly copulation or conjuncture. So as considering the resemblance they bear with Baboons, *which I could observe kept frequent company with the Women*, ... their savage life, diet, exercise, and the like considerations, these may be said to be the descoent [descent] of Satyrs, if any such ever were... Now what Philosophers alledge concerning the function of the Soul may be made applicable to *these Animals*, that the Soul of Man is gradually rather than specifically differenced from the Souls of Beasts...

Herbert's claims are staggering and foul, but what is most disturbing is the claim of witness: he is pretending to have actually observed these things, so as to create an argument about a different species of human, even implying that Africans do not belong in the category of human at all. In this early stage of the scientific revolution, Herbert was claiming the mantle of empirical authenticity. His edition of 1677 would underscore and elaborate these assertions.

Herbert was building not on earlier claims about Africans, but on similarly bizarre claims that Spanish priests had made about Peruvians.

Upon which account, the Spaniard of late years made it the Subject of their dispute, whether the West-Indians were of descent of Adam, or no? or whether they were not rather a middle species of Men and Apes? Had it been a *quare* concerning these Salvages, might have

carried with it greater probability. *Bocerus* also treating of monstrous births in Peru says that it proceeds from a Copulation of Women with Monkeys; which as repugnant to the due course of nature is not to be maintained; though these are a subject for that dispute as much as any.

Perhaps the creepiest part is how Herbert describes such activities as repugnant, and argues that if this happened in Peru, why not in Africa, and connects such sexual activities between Peruvians and "apes" with "monstrous births," with a non-human "middle species." Herbert then returned to the subject of Africans, to quote Aristotle, in Latin, that "all human beings throughout the world worship god, true or false" and concludes: "I saw no signs of any knowledge of God, the law of Nature scarce being observed: No spark of Devotion. He thus insinuated that Africans were far worse than mere "savages." They were, quite simply, not human.

Herbert's grotesque addition of such material in 1664, just as the Royal African Company launched the slave trade to its colonies in the Americas and as England began to supply enslaved Africans to the Spanish in Jamaica (their first formal involvement in the Asiento), suggests that pseudo-scientific stories and lies helped to justify the differential treatment of Africans. Herbert added these new claims without traveling to Africa again. He also added new sections in 1664, wherein he made observations about other parts of the world that he had never visited, as other scholars have noted. There is no doubt that Herbert's imaginative additions — his lies — about African and ape sexuality emerged not from his observations, but out of deliberate propaganda efforts. His claims went far beyond those of Bodin, Vanini or Donelha. They had referred

to rumors. He was writing ethnographically and describing what he claimed to have observed. By linking such sex acts to monstrous births, he provided a basis for considering Africans as a different species of non-humans.

Herbert's claims were far from universally accepted. Over the two decades that followed, many would argue with Herbert's claims that Africans were a separate species. Those who did include Chief Justice Sir Mathew Hale in *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* in 1676, the only work of his that he allowed to be printed during his lifetime. In the book, over four hundred pages long, Hale asserted the common humanity of all peoples, and argued that heathens, too, have souls.

These arguments echoed across the Atlantic. In Barbados, a minister named Morgan Godwyn referred to both the original claims and to Hale's response. A former student of John Locke's at Christ Church College, Oxford, he spent fifteen years as a minister in Virginia and Barbados. He mixed up the source of such claims, confusing Herbert with a travel writer named Tavernier, but he took pains to explicitly refute them when he published his *Negroes and Indians Advocate* in London in 1680. Godwyn reported that even in Barbados many were talking about the allegations of bestiality and bestial progeny, so presumably they were in London as well. He then carefully challenged the accuracy of Tavernier's account, arguing that mandrills or apes (whom he calls "drills") who have some of the semblance of men are actually very different from humans.

Godwyn alleged that the only people who disagree with his observations — who express "wild opinions" that follow Herbert's claims about interspecies sexuality — were planters, who were driven to these falsehoods by their hunger for profit. He refers to such allegations of sexual encounters between Africans and apes as a "wild speculation." He asserts that the

claim is made only by those who want it to be true, in order to deny rights to Africans, including their right to baptism.

Insisting that such claims of interbreeding between Africans and monkeys were patently ridiculous, he observed that the Africans whom he met in Barbados were smarter than many of the Englishmen around them. He argues, again contrary to Herbert, that Africans have religious sensibilities. All of the Africans he met were people with souls who possessed reason. "The shape and figure of our Negro's Bodies, and their Limbs and Members; their Voice and Countenance, in all things according with other Mens; together with their Risability and Discourse (Man's peculiar Faculties). . . These being the most clear emanations and results of Reason, and therefore the most genuine and perfect characters of Homoniety [humanity]."

Godwyn asserted that all the Africans he knew were capable of learning to read and to write. "How should they otherwise be capable of *Trades*, and other no less Manly impoyments; as also of *Reading and Writing*; or shew so much Discretion in management of Business; eminent in divers of them; but wherein (we know) that many of our own People [Europeans] are *deficient*, were they not truly Men?" Some have become overseers of plantations, and have been placed in charge of complex financial and management responsibilities. "Or why should their Owners, Men of Reason no doubt, conceive them fit to exercise the place of Governours and *Overseers* to their *fellow Slaves*, which is frequently done, if they were but meer Brutes?" He then poked some fun at racist idiocy: "It would certainly be a pretty kind of *Comical Frenzie*, to imploy Cattel about Business, and to constitute them Lieutenants, Overseers, and Governours, like as [the Roman Emperor] Domitian is said to have made his Horse a Consul."

Godwyn, as noted above, was one of Locke's few students from his time at Oxford, and almost certainly met with Locke in the 1680s upon his return from Barbados. Locke had a copy of Godwyn's *Negroes and Indians Advocate* in his library, and appears to have used the same words, in his brief discussion of the issue, as Morgan; like Godwyn, he referred not to apes or monkeys but to "drills," short for mandrills, one kind of monkey. Although he read widely in travel narratives, and referred to them frequently in his writings, Locke did not own a copy of Thomas Herbert's travels. He did own Tavernier's six volumes, but if he tried to find Godwyn's reference, which was clearly to Herbert and not to Tavernier, he would have been frustrated, as I was, because it is not there. Locke's references to the source of the claims that Godwyn was countering were therefore left vague.



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Locke discussed these claims in a short section in the middle of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and only abstractly. Uncannily, he dedicated his treatise to Thomas Herbert, the eighth Earl of Pembroke, who was the son of Philip Herbert, the patron of Thomas Herbert the traveler (now dead), the current Earl's cousin. It is almost as though there was a strange trans-generational conversation about these questions — of what defines a human or an animal species — and the current earl was trying to distance himself from his father's and his cousin's views.

In the third book of his work (§22-23, first edition), Locke speculated about the inadequacies of our words to understand the essence of ideas, including our ideas about the essence of human beings as a distinct species. How do we form an abstract idea about a species, whether human, animal or plant?

It cannot be based merely on appearance, as there are animals that look like humans: "there are Creatures in the World, that have shapes like ours, but are hairy, and want Language and Reason." It cannot be merely by the ability to speak, as there are humans who are born with birth defects, who lack reason, or are born without the ability to speak: "There are Naturals amongst us, that have perfectly our shape, but want Reason, and some of them Language too." He continued that there is a third category of "Creatures . . . that have Language, and Reason, and a shape in other Things agreeing with ours, have hairy tails." So how do we know who is a human? "If it be asked, whether these be all Men, or no, all of humane Species; 'tis plain, the Question refers only to the nominal essence." Unfortunately, he argues, most would draw conclusions based on a judgment of whether the "internal Constitution" reflects the "outward frame." Locke's larger effort in this section was to identify the "real essence" of different species and how humans use "abstract ideas" to understand that essence, and to see beyond the outward appearance. Even children with major malformations, whom he here calls "naturals" or "changelings," still have an "internal constitution" that makes them human, even if these are different from "reasonable men." They are different from apes ("drills"), even if they share an outward appearance.

He then introduces a reference to the allegations that had been floating around: whether "women have conceived by drills" a kind of monkey. He argues that it is difficult to tell a species merely from generation, since different species can generate mixed issue. as when "the mixture of a Horse, and an Ass" makes a mule; it confutes our ability to think about species. Then he wrote the crucial sentence: "For if History lie not, Women have conceived by Drills; and what real Species,

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by that measure, such a Production will be in Nature, will be a new Question; and we have reason to think this not impossible.” We are left wondering about his source. (Tacitus, via Bodin? Herbert? Godwyn’s unnamed source?)

Yet the phrase “if history lie not” already expresses skepticism. Likewise, Locke states that if in fact a woman and an ape could have children, such an offspring “will be a new question” as to what species it is, since it would be, if so, in-between the two. The words “will be” indicates Locke does not in fact believe that anyone respectable has seen it. It might be true — as in the case of an “ass and a mare” — that such a union would produce a mule (which is sterile). But he draws a distinction between a woman (of human species) and a drill (of animal species).

Moreover, Locke does not, as Kendi implies, use a racial signifier in this discussion: not “west African women” or “negroes” or “Africans.” He simply uses the word “women,” without any qualifiers. If one did not already know about this debate, one would have no idea what Locke was talking about. Indeed, inasmuch as a reader of Herbert might think he was talking about women in Africa, he states that these are women like all women. It is a dramatic leap from this theorizing about the essence of humanity as a species, and our conceptual understanding of “man” as opposed to animals, to Kendi’s claim that Locke argued that “Ethiopians and apes must have the same ancestry, distinct from Europeans.” Nor is there anything here to suggest that any particular group of women is hypersexual. This discussion is a minor part of Locke’s larger project, which is to understand how humans come to have reason.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, then, Locke held that any claims that women had sex with apes, “if true,” would not create a separate species. His argument

is not as strong as Godwyn’s, but he was also not answering the question directly, as was Godwyn. He was addressing the question of how humans categorize ideas. Kendi’s claim is false and highly misleading. And since Kendi uses the claim that Locke originated this particularly heinous racism to impugn the integrity of Western liberalism, the slander is rather a large one. There is nothing pedantic about getting this intellectual history right. The stakes are considerable.

Does referring to such an issue as procreation between women and apes, even in such an oblique way as Locke did here, constitute in and of itself racism, especially if the emphasis is on the claim that women and apes are of two entirely different species? Is it racist to mention the claim explicitly and then to challenge it point by point, as Godwyn did? By such a standard Kendi himself would be racist, as would I, merely for considering this evidence. Kendi claimed that Locke was arguing for a racist position that “most feared to engage in publicly.” But Locke, and especially Morgan Godwyn, whom Kendi also discusses, were arguing *against* such claims, and especially against such implications. Godwyn in particular is acting as an “antiracist” here, to borrow Kendi’s own categories, and Locke should either be considered an anti-racist or a neutral figure.

Why does it matter for Kendi’s larger argument whether or not his analysis of Locke and Godwyn — and of other contemporary thinkers such as Richard Baxter — is accurate? The answer is simple: Kendi makes it appear as though virtually all whites agreed with racist positions that were “stamped from the beginning,” including those whom we might expect to do the opposite, such as “enlightened” thinkers who advocated for human rights, such as Locke. Such references from Locke and Godwyn are Kendi’s “proof.” They permit him to argue that ideas about consent or rights were

meant to apply only to whites, and therefore are themselves morally and racially flawed.

In this first section of his book, Kendi conflates the arguments of many authors — not only Locke but also Richard Baxter and Morgan Godwyn — with those they are arguing against. The crucial figure with whom they were contending was Herbert, whom Kendi ignores. Kendi instead identifies another French traveler as the father of racial classification and a “friend of Locke’s”: Francois Bernier. Locke did correspond with Bernier, and Bernier did distinguish between four different races of human beings (African, European, Asian, and Laplander), but he did not state that these different races were of different species. For purposes of this consideration, Locke’s work does not reflect any theories of racial difference. The divergence between the actual text of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *the Negroes and Indians Advocate*, Baxter’s *Christian Directory*, and Kendi’s interpretation of them makes it appear that Kendi did not read the originals of these texts, but only other scholars who quoted from them.

Kendi also claimed that Locke’s family was long involved in the slave trade. “In 1554,” he writes, “an expedition captained by John Lok, ancestor of philosopher John Locke, arrived in England after traveling to ‘Guinea.’” Yet the *Dictionary of National Biography* — not exactly an arcane or out-of-the-way source — confirms that “John Lok,” the person who traveled to Guinea, died without issue. The philosopher John Locke’s father was John Locke; his grandfather, born in 1674, was Nicholas Locke and he was a clothier by profession. His great-grandfather, born in 1540, was Edward Locke, and his great-great grandfather was Nicholas Locke, born in 1517. They were artisans, not slave traders. Repeatedly, Kendi labels people who criticized slavery and racist ideas — and were

persecuted for such criticism — as supporters of both. I would put Richard Baxter in particular in this category: in 1775, the ideas of this alleged racist villain were cited by none other than Thomas Paine to argue against slavery.

As for Locke himself, he does not emerge from careful examination with clean hands. Between 1660 and 1675 he and his mentor, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, cooperated with Charles II and his brother James: both owned stock in the Royal African Company (sold in 1675), and both participated on some level in the crafting of the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina in 1669, which included language about the powers of masters over slaves (even if, as I have shown elsewhere, most of the provisions corresponded to the earlier charter and to the wishes of the eight proprietors). But Locke’s later work, for which he is best known, arose in critical response to such policies and attitudes by the Stuarts, including the *Two Treatises of Government* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. After the Glorious Revolution, he was appointed to positions of substantial responsibility on the Board of Trade, with colonial oversight, and in that capacity he helped to reverse earlier policies that had given planters fifty acres of land for buying a slave. He also argued that “people of all nations are of one blood” (from Acts 1:17) and that the children of “negroes” and Indians who lived in the colony should be “baptized, catechized and bred christians—” a right that arguably, given then current legal norms that to gain the rights of subjects one had to be Christian, should have enabled them to claim other rights, including potentially manumission. Did Locke do enough to reverse slavery? No. But did he make arguments that indicated that he thought Africans were fully human with rights, and part of the same species? Absolutely.



Of course Locke is merely one figure of the Enlightenment, and there were many more over two centuries. It is certainly not my purpose here to exonerate all these figures, some of whom expressed racist sentiments. I wish, rather, to place those comments into broader struggles over power, over empire, over legitimacy; and to insist that outside of such contexts they cannot be properly understood; and to suggest that the Enlightenment had its origins in the struggle against slavery, a struggle which is much older than recent historical discussions would have us believe. Likewise, early modern science as it emerged in this period should be put into the context of the religious debates and the travelers accounts and the political structure that surrounded it. Interestingly enough, Charles II's Royal Society, which promoted science, never gave Thomas Herbert a platform (from what I can discover); he certainly never published in their *Philosophical Transactions*.

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And still earlier, it is possible to trace an entire range of speculations about apes and their similarities (or not) to humans made not by scientists or philosophers but by religious figures and the writers of a wide range of pamphlets, many of them not respectable, though their authors are little known. In 1670, for example, in his treatise *The Divine History of the Genesis of the World*, the cleric Samuel Gott clearly distinguished between "Apes, Baboons, Marmosets, Drills, and I known not what Bestia Fauuns and satyrs, as one degree removed form ourselves . . . yet we [humans] Classically differ, and vastly excell them, in our Intellective Spirit." In 1653, in its second edition, which was enlarged with many woodcuts, John Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis* reflected on these questions, through both his reading of a *Book of Monsters*

written by the Dutch physician Nicolaes Tulp in 1641, and his own observation of a Guinea Drill that he had viewed that Christmastime near Charing Cross in London.

The haire of whose head (which was black) grew very like the haire of a child; it was a compleat Female too, not above eleven months old, and yet it seemed to me to answer the Dimensions which Tulpius gives of his Angola Satyr. The Keeper of it affirms, it will grow up to the stature of five foot, which is the ordinary size of little men: He would go upright and drinke after the same manner. Her Keeper intended never to cut her haire, but to let it grow in full length, like a womans; in case she should dye, her carkasse was bespoke for Dissection by some Anatomists, who perchance have a Curiosity to search out what capacity of Organs this Rational Bruit had for the reception of a reasonable soule, or at least of such a delitescent reason; which Drill is since dead, and I beleeve dissected, but of the Dissectors and their observations I have not received any intelligence.

In 1699 an English scientist would publish a comprehensive account of such a dissection of a Drill, this time with the patronage of the Royal Society. He concluded that it and humans were quite distinct. Moreover, Bulwer proceeded to tell a story that made the woman who had sex with the ape not an African but a European, a Portuguese, woman:

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Of which monster I may say what Jordanus saies of the aforesaid Orang Outang, or Tulpius his wild man, that it proceeded from the wicked copulation of man and beast, the Devill Cooperating, and Divine revenge (without all

doubt) ensuing thereupon: of the same Tribe and Originall were those two children which the Portugall woman bore to the Great Ape, when she was exposed into a desert Island inhabited only by such Apes; a story well known in Portugall, and is worth the reading in Delrio.

By the late eighteenth century such debates had become more widespread, and they continued, as in the seventeenth century, to interweave the political with the scientific. A Jamaican named Edward Long, in his history of that island, repeated comments that came from Thomas Herbert, alleging that blacks were a separate species. Thomas Jefferson, in a shocking passage in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1781, referred casually to “the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species.” Jefferson’s *Notes* originated in his correspondence with the French naturalist Buffon, and his awful remark appears in a section wherein he described supposed differences between white and black peoples. Jefferson was not the founder of modern racism; that dubious accomplishment, as should now be clear, belonged to Thomas Herbert. But once again the only appropriate frame for understanding such racism is the full historical picture. These were questions about which Jefferson was torn. Elsewhere he spoke powerfully about including Africans in the ranks of “all men are created equal,” most notably in his original draft of the Declaration, where he referred to Africans as “*MEN*,” in capital letters and italics, and in another section of his notes on Virginia, where he wrote that in the event of a slave uprising God would side with the enslaved, as theirs was the cause of justice. It began: “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever.”

My point is that some Enlightenment figures, even as they made arguments that we might today want to celebrate, also reacted to racism, sometimes building upon it, sometimes rejecting it. The figures singled out by earlier scholars as “enlightened” hardly originated racism. The real garbage was usually generated by figures that earlier scholars in the twentieth century did not choose to celebrate, or honor, or reproduce. They are not generally included in our accounts of what we admire as our “civilization.” Such seventeenth-century figures as Herbert and others, who legitimated both the slave trade and slavery for all non-Christians and specifically for Africans and Indians, are a perfect example. If we want to understand the origins of racism, then, we need to look beyond the streetlight, beyond the old canons.

We must understand that crucial texts of liberalism and the Enlightenment that to this day anchor our educational and political systems emerged within a context that included the distasteful and the unusual. We must look to the freaks and the monsters, those whose ideas still do not bear reprinting except as excerpts and in context. We need to discover the QAnon of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such reconstructions should always be in a political context, for the creation of racist ideas was always a political act — propounded, as Godwyn noted in 1680, by those whose interests were at stake, whose “wild opinions” were promulgated “by the inducement and instigation of our Planters chief deity, Profit.” Godwyn acknowledged that “they’ll infer their Negro’s Brutality” to “justify their reduction of them under Bondage; disable them from all Right and Claims.”

Racists were emphatically not “stamped from the beginning.” Racist ideas were contested, and debated, often sharply, by many Enlightenment thinkers who created

comprehensive arguments that challenged all hierarchies, including racism and slavery. The evils of racism and slavery provoked in their own time a tradition of antiracism. Even within the limitations of their time and their discourse, these disputations helped to create the foundation for many of the principles of human rights and democracy.



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Marianne 1960, Good Greek Coffee, Grecian Woman Study, Montreal Woman No. 1, Just To have Been, My First Wife, Montreal Woman No. 2, Montreal Visitor No. 1, and Vibrant but Dead by Leonard Cohen.

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