



## 200th Anniversary of the Slave Trade Act of 1808

# Contemporary Implications of the Abolition of the Slave Trade

January 10, 2008

The Slave Trade Act of 1808, passed by Congress in March of 1807, became effective January 1, 1808. On January 10, 2008 the Center for the National Archives Experience held a day-long symposium to commemorate its 200th anniversary and raise awareness of the slave trade, its abolition, and its impact on United States history and culture.

This panel examines how the legacy of enslavement continues to affect contemporary American society. Moderated by **James Early**, director, Cultural Heritage Policy, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage; panelists include **Ali A. Mazrui** (pictured), director, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University; **Georgia Dunston**, professor and founding director, National Human Genome Center, Howard University; **George Dalley**, chief of staff, Office of Congressman Charles Rangel; **Katrina Browne**, film maker, *Traces of the Trade*; and **Clarence Lusane**, professor, School of International Service, American University.

**JOE HARRIS:** And we also are planning to have some questions and answers at the end so let us know begin this and I'd like to present at this time Mr. James Early, the director of the cultural heritage policy at the Center for Folk Life and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution. James Early.

**JAMES EARLY:** Thank you Doctor Harris and good afternoon.

[applause]

Just two quick acknowledgements to the preceding panels. I've got my garment on and when I put it on in my mind this morning I then put it on, on my back and I say that not just as a light comment, but as one to observe that the strategies of being descendents of Africans in relationship to this historical event is something



that I think each panel in its own way has tried to acknowledge. Doctor Harris has indicated that the format conception of the symposium was to move from the historical to the contemporary with implications from the now to the future. But what I think has been quite obvious to us all throughout the day is first that the craft of history is always a contemporary issue which has implications not only for the elucidation of what has gone before us but how we understand where we are and that while it is dealing with issues of evidence and documentation, and clarity and qualification for the purpose of trying to come up with what actually happened, it also from the contemporary moment, which is an implication, has to extrapolate about what might have happened. And so we move now into one in which the evidence is thought not to always be so clear because all of this happened back there.

But we have a group of panelists who I think will point to indicators that are quite clear at least in the categorical sense of their relationship both to the abolition, but what the abolition was a reflection of and that was the enslavement of these people from Africa and the engagement of a sociology in the US and around the world. One of the other observations that I think has been clear throughout the day is that while we are dealing with the particularity of the United States what took place in the United States took place in a global context. But we are in a new global moment, the earlier global moment did not have internet, it did not have the conception of civil society and the transnational organization of civil society as we have today. And thus while it was, as has been pointed out, an obvious connection between those who were involved in investment capital in one country, they were involved in other countries, it was not so clear of the engagement and the communication among the enslaved in these various areas of the world. But for the purposes of contemporary implications some of the obvious elements that now emerge is that there is a global conversation which is very much related to technology, the issue of reparations, that may have had a particular genesis of discussion here in the United States but has attracted people of African descent all around the world, including on the continent of Africa. It is clear now that issues of health are related to what happened historically and that those are not circumscribed solely by what nation one was enslaved in.

The case of AIDS knows no national anthem, it knows no national frontiers, it knows no national languages, but the implications of what happened during the period of slavery and the circumstance that has been set for certain issues of that scale I think are obvious. The issues of policy emanating from that period has contemporary implications, not just here in the United States. I am mindful that the United States government both democrats and republicans literally turned their backs and walked out of the world conference against racism and other forms of discrimination in Durban, South Africa in 2001 and most recently has taken a position that it will not proactively engage the Post Durban conference.



That conference turned on crimes against humanity, slavery as a crime against the humanity, so again the implications are there. We have a panel which will have a democratic opportunity from three to five minutes of speaking, but there is no justice because [laughter] it is a panel rich in disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge and experience and of course the timeframe would really not allow one of them for a couple of hours to give all of the information that would be useful for us.

So we have agreed that they will make a thesis statement and then we will open it up in a dialogue or what Janetta Coe might call a multi log because contemporary implications have something to do not only with people on the stage, but all of us. We are the contemporary sociology related to this topic and the issue of implications suggests to us what is to be done with this historical knowledge we have in this moment and how might we use it as we go forth both as a national society, but a globally engaged society. So we will proceed in the order of the listing of the panelists. Doctor Georgia Dunston, founding director of the national human Genome center at Howard University where the mission is to explore the science of and teach the knowledge about DNA sequence variation and it's interaction with the environment and the causality, prevention, and treatment of diseases common in African-Americans and other people of African descent. And while I will not read all of this thesis statements sentences that I asked them to send me, because I only received one, I perhaps received one that I think contextualizes the entire panel and her thesis sentence, for every physical, biological, material, or historical reality, there is a psychological correlate. She will be followed by George Dalley. George Dalley is council and staff director for Charles B. Rangle of New York, previously a partner with Holland and Knight in Washington, DC, practicing in the areas of legislative, administrative, and international law and is very much engaged on issues dealing with the international realities of African descendents, both on the continent of Africa and particularly throughout the Americas. George will be followed by Doctor Clarence Lusane, I failed to mention that the activist implications of this topic in the contemporary moment - let's see if I can find Doctor Lusane's bio here - he is an activist but in addition he is associate professor at American University where he is the director of comparative of the international and race relations program. He deals with issues of race identity and hegemony. His most recent book, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, foreign policy, race, in the new American Century and he's now working on a new study of jazz and international relations and I think he has a book that he will reference when we get to him. Doctor Lusane will be followed by Katrina Brown. One of the broad implications I failed to mention is that this topic has catalyzed a new kind of discussion about social responsibility among European Americans, not as an act of contrition, we've had great difficulty in this country talking about slavery as a crime against humanity, and even about making a simple apology for that. But others have taken it upon themselves not to feel guilty, not to feel sidelined, but to be



proactive and to deal with their legacies in a socially responsible way and one of those persons is Katrina Dewolf, the producer of a documentary about her slave trading family in Rhode Island and that book I think has been produced with her cousin and she will say more. And then we will conclude with Doctor Ali Mazrui, director of global cultural studies at SUNY Binghamton in New York. He is chancellor of the University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya, senior scholar in African Studies at Cornell University and his latest book *A Tale of Two Africas*, Nigeria and South Africa, and Islam between globalization and counter terrorism, both in 2006, and of course you are I'm sure familiar with him from the TV series, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* by PBS and the BBC in 1986. We will not proceed to five minute presentations by each of our panelists and then I will ask you to start lining up to the two mics at the end of the isles and we will hear your participation. Dr. Dunston.

**GEORGIA DUNSTON:** First of all I would like to say that it is truly a pleasure and an honor to be a part of this panel and to be here in this theater with this group this evening. Secondly I have to begin by saying I am a professor Joseph Harris devotee and because of that when Professor Harris asked me if I would be on this panel there were no second thoughts. The answer was yes. But as soon as I said yes I was in a panic because I said, "Why would he ask me to be on this panel?" I heard some person say earlier that my history leaves a lot to be desired. So I tell you determining what to speak about, I'll say that when we're under stress, it's a common fact you revert to type. And for me, I grew up with a mom that taught me, Georgia Mae, whenever you have a question, and I had a question; what am I going to say on this panel? You ask God. And I've done that with many questions in my life and I literally said, "Oh God what am I going to say on this panel?"

Immediately in reflection however as I thought about it, because my mind first looked at the historical aspect and my deficiencies in that regard, but then it said contemporary implications. And I said what is a more contemporary implication of the abolition of the slave trade than health disparities, and that is my love in terms of the work that I do. Health disparities by definition, by wikipedia which references the national definition, but population specific differences in the presence of disease, disease outcomes and access to health care. It's a fact that we have had tremendous advances in our understanding of the pathophysiology of disease and great strides in treatments to disease, but it's also a fact that African-American carry the burden of disproportionate disease such as asthma, hypertension, type II diabetes, cancers, prostate cancer, early age and progressive breast cancer. So these diseases that statically occur at a much higher frequency proportionately in the population qualify then as a disparity. Now, health disparity, there's been a lot of studies on the socio-economic basis for the disparities, but there's been very little on the biology and in fact at this point in time when folk want to introduce the biology, it raises questions because



the biology is tied to the genetics and we're in an era now of genetic medicine and let me then just make this statement by introduction, that the thesis statement that I gave indicated that every experience we have in life has a psychological correlate. It means that the memory of that experience is stored and the memory influences our reaction to events in life subsequent to that. That's true across the board. So the point is, slavery, the abolition of slavery was a historical event. Every individual has a psychological correlate. The psychological correlate is expressed in memory. Memory influences behavior. Behavior is clearly tied to health disparities. Behavior not only in what we eat, but also in what we think and key to what we think is what we think about ourselves, how we see ourselves, how we define ourselves in the context is instruction for our bodies in terms of how to respond to whatever experience we're having. The genome is the front center of biology today. The genome is all the information that each of us inherits at the moment we begin life as a single cell, we get a complete genome with all the instructions for making the human body and operating it, all the information is there. The information for biologically how we store memory is there. And now there is a great effort to identify at the genome level all biology.

The key is psychology also has biological basis. Someone said to me, early on, this is our time, meaning African-Americans. I never knew what that really meant until I tried to prepare for this. It is our time because memory can be transferred culturally but now from epigenetic studies we find that it can be transferred even through the DNA. And we come here as enslaved with the memory of all that diversity I heard talking about, already with us and expressed in how we live here, but slavery left a memory and each of us have memory that stores it differently and the way we store it has impacted how we define ourselves, and our self image is a regulating factor of our biology.

And so we need now to use the science to help us identify what are the factors that we have retained that is negative in that it can be correlated with health disparities. So we have a chance now to really take a lead in this field that never has been in history. Why? Because the mainstream backs away from the fact that the genome tells us that 98% of our inheritance is not in the physical body. It only takes about 1.5% of our genetic information to make all the working parts of the body. The rest that we are learning about is in controlling the 1.5% that's made, it's in regulation, it's in control and it means that we have got to find a way to legitimately bring the role of the mind into the arena of how the body works. Mind body connection is perfect for health disparities. We talk about stress and its impact, this is a specific answer of the role that the mind and how we perceive ourselves because stress is not something outside, stress is how we see ourselves in the context of whatever that is that's threatening our sense of integrity. I'm sorry.



[applause]

**EARLY:** Would you now please welcome George Dalley.

**GEORGE DALLEY:** I want to thank Doctor Harris for having enough faith in my ability to put two sentences together to come. You guys - I've been so impressed today with the scholarship in this room and I haven't written anything longer than a two page briefing memo in years. But the thought and the sentiment also want to acknowledge Howard Dodson and Michael Turner. The Schomburg Center and Michael's work at Hunter make us very proud in Charlie Rangle's office. They have maintained Harlem, our beloved community in the leadership of the great movements of this world. We'd do anything for them and we just need to do more to continue your work and make it as effective as it can be. But Charlie Rangle sent his greetings and is very proud to be able to represent you and the work that you do.

[applause]

I'm going to try to be provocative because I want to see these stairs get a little full. From where I sit, what the doctor was talking about may be the central problem because we see more manifestation of the sickness of the community than we see the health of the community. I don't think, I came up, I grew mature on the civil rights movement I remember the period where we spent a lot of time sort of affirming ourselves, gaining self esteem, trying to overcome segregation, sometimes wearing the dashiki, sometimes learning the history that you guys have done such a wonderful job of documenting and have done even better in the last 40 or 50 years.

There's more and more evidence that African people are wonderful people. We have survived everything, we've survived holocausts, and yet we still, I hear questions today about, is it true that Africans really made contributions? We still don't get it, or we doubt it. There's something so fundamental that's lacking that we are not, I believe as a people able to pull ourselves out of some very depressing situations. There really is a crisis of the black male in education, especially in higher education, but throughout the education community. There are health disparities. There's poverty, unspeakable poverty. New Orleans showed that, it still exists. Disproportionately black, what is it of our common experience that continues to make that the reality of our community? And how does what we're talking about in this room today relate to providing enough is it self image? What is it that brings our youth to a recognition that there's more to life than some of the pathologies that we see? We have a - we talked about Barack Obama earlier. I'm excited about that candidate, even if Charlie Rangle is supporting Hillary Clinton.





[laughter]

But one of the real challenges that Barack faces is some doubts that I already heard in this room. He may not get the black vote he needs to win South Carolina because not enough black folks believe he can win. We don't believe in ourselves, we have had so many disappointments in this society, I think we've stopped believing in the capacity for this country to change and maybe the cynics are those who are pessimistic about the country are right, but to let that attitude of disbelief keep you from doing something, that's self defeating. But I think it's going to happen. I think if Obama had won in New Hampshire and the press and CNN had affirmed that he was really on his way, black folks would jump on that bandwagon so fast because they saw it in the cable news and they'd be ready to believe it. I don't know whether black folks really have enough belief in the possibility of their own empowerment to stand up for it. So I think that's something that's fundamentally wrong with our community and it has to spend from this horrific experience we've had. But a part from analyzing it which we do very well, what is it that we can do to really begin to bring about a new reality in our community? And I tell you why we need a new reality. I sat on capital hill with Charlie and the Black Caucus and please feel free in your criticisms in what we do or don't do, but we think we're responsive to our community. We try to be responsive to our community. We're not as good as we should be about working the appropriations process. We are recognizing now that earmarks are much more of a need in reality than those of us who started off with a sort of policy focus and went on our committees with fancy names, but not appropriations. Now we're trying to get on appropriations. We're speaking to the speaker about appropriations, we're trying to learn the game better, but we are far empowering the black community.

We're proud that John Lewis was the prime sponsor of the bill that created the new civil rights museum. We are proud of the support that we give when we know about the institution and we're well enough positioned. We try to respond, we try to provide resources because we believe it's important for our community. And if we don't do better it's because we have just perhaps been a bit naive but I also would think maybe it's we're not challenged enough to do more. So I invite you to challenge us, Charlie Rangle and the members of the black caucus. If you see that we're not doing something that needs to be done, don't just complain about it to each other, please come and try to challenge us. Howard the bill that you talked about this morning was passed by the senate. It was signed in the last act before they went out.

That's the good news. The bad news is the hold that you mentioned was by senator Coburn of Oklahoma and he stripped the funding. So we have the commission but we have no money for it. Well there's some ways maybe we can fix it but we're in this fiscal year already, we're going to have to talk about how we



put together some private sector efforts to get some initial money and then maybe later on we can amend the Smithsonian budget or some other vehicle to provide some assistance. We will want to do that because we believe that the commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade is an important vehicle to focus again on what slavery meant and maybe get around to focusing on the what the legacy of slavery is, and that is a tremendous psychological disability that continues to afflict us. I really get annoyed sometimes about all of the celebration in our media of success by blacks in society. We all know Dick Parson and Ken Shenold and Beyonce, whatever field, there's a lot of imagery that says African-Americans are really doing a great job. But that's not what the statistics say, that's not what the doctor knows in terms of health disparities and economic disparities and so on. So we really, I would say that we who work on the hill would like very much to have you engage because we certainly now that we have democratic control of the congress and black caucus chairs we certainly are in a position to set the agenda.

But let me also be real. John Conyers has a bill to call for reparations, I think reparations is a natural outcome of the discussion that we have had. But John Conyers has I believe 20 cosponsors for that bill, there are 43 members of the Black Caucus. He doesn't have a majority of the black caucus on the bill. Charlie has a bill to exonerate Marcus Garvey, we have less than half of the black caucus members supporting that bill. They're not hearing it. These are not bad people. You know one thing about a member of congress that I've learned over the years is they want to get reelected, so they really pay attention to their district, they listen to people, and if they're not doing something it's because they don't equate that with their reelection, they don't equate that as being important. You guys ultimately - you may think that the congress is far away and unresponsive, and in some ways they are, they certainly have been unresponsive to the American people on the war, unresponsive in many other areas, but if you really advocate, generally people at least pay attention, they know about your position. So it's important that we begin to advocate more strongly. And then on the final provocative note I just want to respond to my good friend Jim, and Jim I'm happy to be on the panel with you too, I've always admired your work. We're not going to get to Durban or any follow up unless we can get rid of Zionism is racism, that community that makes that a foremost issue is so much better politically organized and stronger than we are. There's no sense us complaining about it until we can do something about organizing ourselves so that we have some kind of equivalent political muscle. All we're going to do is just get disappointed every time the UN tries to do something about racism unless there can be some elimination of the linkage of violence and racism. Thank you.

[applause]





**EARLY:** Thank you George, would you now welcome Dr. Clarence Lusane.

**CLARENCE LUSANE:** Good afternoon. I went to Howard University and I never took a class with Joe Harris, but nevertheless we are all students of Joe Harris, without a doubt.

It is actually a great honor for me as well to be on the panel for a number of different reasons, one of which I want to echo the statement made earlier by Dr. Reagon about the problem of transition of knowledge and dealing particularly with the young people that really need to carry this on. Beginning this fall, for those of us who are teaching at the University level, our students will be students who were born in 1990 and these will be students who will want to know why people who were enslaved didn't organize by using the worldwide web.

[laughter]

This is what we are going to be dealing with and it's going to be incumbent upon us to pass this along through the web and other means. Let me begin by telling a story and hopefully there's a point at the end of it. A few years ago I was in Sarajevo and I was walking along Majaket Bridge, which, for those who are historians in the room, this was the bridge where arch duke Ferdinand was shot which started world war I and the river is not that wide, perhaps where I'm seated to the end of the room, to the other side of the auditorium and it's a number of bridges that go across the river. And I was walking along the river and I looked across and I saw a black guy who I thought was African, as it turns out he was, and he was with a white woman and a child which as it turns out was his family. And as I saw him, he saw me, and we began to wave at each other.

[laughter]

Because he certainly wondered what I was doing there and I certainly wondered what he was doing in Bosnia. This is where it gets really interesting because behind this couple or this family there was another couple, there was a white couple who turns out were an American couple and they begin to wave at me as well.

[laughter]

And so we're all waving, but this raises a very profound question because the question was who actually am I most connected with? Is it this American couple that I don't know, or this African guy who I don't know as well, and it brought to mind what Dubois talked about with this two-ness, which is actually a three-ness, a four-ness, a five-ness a hundred-ness that we all have to deal with and so this leads to my first conclusion from the panel title that one of the consequences of



the slave trade, slavery resistance of this slavery and state sponsored abolition of slavery was to create a wide range of identities that are competing and conflicting, but also are complementary and they're fluid and contextual and all of that is what we have to deal with as we look at around the world this whole question of Diaspora which actually to me is plural, because Diaspora created other Diasporas in other people and other panels have talked about it, these other Diasporas which are meaningful identities for people as well as in their African roots. Back to the brother on the bridge, so the question is then, so the question that I raised was actually the wrong question of who I'm most connected with. The real question really is how am I connected with different people around the world and with different identities? And for the brother the question was for me how am I connected? Part of it is the commonality of history but it's also the commonality of circumstances, and historically this is why in African-American community, and I would argue in other African descent communities around the world why there has been bonding it's because the commonality of circumstances have also been there that have been recognized, have been part of a progressive allegiance that's been in these communities. I've been extremely fortunate and have had opportunities to travel, I've been to about 60 countries, including some countries that don't exist anymore such as East Germany, some countries that weirdly exist such as North Korea and in all of these countries there are black narratives.

There are questions of the coming of black people through a wide range of experiences, slavery and who settled in these countries and begin to create histories. So for those of us who are doing research all of these are stories that are in many ways still untold. I spent a number of years working on research that came out in a book called Hitler's Black Victim looking at the experiences of people of African descent under Naziism because the normative history of that experience erases black people and that's something that all of us I think have to take some responsibility in doing and it's not only looking at the narrative in these countries but the relationship between those narratives and the other ongoing narratives that also exist. Final point I want to raise in my last couple minutes; part of what has shaped these experiences were historically globalization. What's shaping these experiences now is a particular manifestation of globalization, American hegemony and American hegemony is a powerful force in the furtherance of global racism on a day to day, hour to hour basis. It's not incidental, coincidental or accidental that you can sit in an internet café in Sarajevo and hear Snoop Doggy Dog in the background or you can be in the suburbs, the para-suburbs in the botteliers, hanging out with the brothers and the sisters and you see cats walking around with t-shirts that say Shaq and Kobe. Right?

This is part of competing discourses and competing practices that we have to address and that's part of the reality of what I would argue as part of liberating



the black diasporas around the world is really a battle against hegemony. And it really means an engagement with the disparities that were mentioned earlier not only in health but in education and criminal justice and job opportunities and labor markets because as you go around the world and you look at the status ladder, as you get to the bottom it gets darker and darker and darker. And this is an experience that's around the world. So our unity should not only be based on these experiences historically but on the reality that people are facing today and what that means is that we have to be in touch with all of the organizations, the non-government organizations, the grass roots groups, the community based organizations that exist in all of these communities that we need to start building bridges with, sharing experiences with, this was the value of the world conference against racism, not that it talked about racism in the broad general terms, but it provided the opportunity to bring together literally thousands of these organizations who for the first time in many instances perhaps the last time, had the opportunity to share, to network, and to move forward.

[applause]

**EARLY:** Thank you Doctor Lusane. Would you now please welcome Miss Katrina Browne.

**KATRINA BROWNE:** And I too want to thank Doctor Harris, I'm one of the late comers to the panel and it's been putting myself forward these days as a potential token white for panels like this and that's a good part of my ongoing education, so thank you for including me.

So what I'm here to share about actually started hundreds of years ago, but for me in my lifetime got very real about ten years ago when I got a booklet in the mail from my grandmother in which she described our family history and had one sentence, two sentences about the fact that my ancestors were slave traders. My ancestors are from Rhode Island, so this was a shock on many levels and I started digging deeper. I realized that I actually kind of knew about it and had repressed that, so that was a clue about something and I started digging deeper and learned that they were actually the largest slave trading family in US history which was not known by my family, they had sort of known and buried it and kind of from, you know but the scholarly research showed that they actually, by virtue of being involved for three generations, and by developing really a dynasty with ships going to West Africa, plantations in Cuba, rum distilleries in Rhode Island, an insurance company, a bank, auction houses in south Carolina and so on and so forth. It's not, so my name creates some confusion.

I'm Browne with an e which is my father's side, this was on my mother's side, but the DeWolf's is their name, they were based in Bristol, Rhode Island and one of them apprenticed with John Brown, so they worked together politically to help



prevent the abolition of the slave trade. So James DeWolf was a senator and John Brown was in congress as well and they worked together to help prevent what happened in 1808. So I quickly realized that this was the tip of the iceberg as I read these scholarly works that New England's complicity in slavery was not limited to my family, it was pervasive.

So that inspired me to decide to make a documentary film to look at our family as an example of this broader pattern and this broader pattern of amnesia in the north. The north were the good guys, the south were the bad guys, is what probably most of us learned in school, so it's been a ten year journey. We actually just finished the documentary this past summer. I'm really proud to say that it was just accepted into the Sundance Film Festival.

[applause]

So our world premier is in about 10 days or so out there and it feels really important and like a great opportunity that it actually coincides with the bicentennial because as I see it, the fact that it's the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade, and the fact that most Americans, particularly white Americans barely even have a distinction in our minds between slavery and the slave trade, so when you talk about the abolition of the trade you can talk about the trade. When you talk about the trade you can talk about that it was northern ships with northern financial backing and northern commodities that were being traded and then there's another interesting part. The way the documentary takes shape is that I invited relatives to come with me on a journey to Ghana, to Cuba and to Rhode Island and nine family members signed up and came with me and three of them are in the room, Tom DeWolf, James Perry and Holly Fulton. Tom's actually just written a book about our experiences called *Inheriting the Trade*, that I recommend.

And so we went and retraced the triangle and we asked ourselves the question of this panel, what is the legacy of slavery, in our case for us as white Americans and it was amazing how hard it was for us to answer that question that obviously boils down to when you have white privilege and it's the air you breathe and the water you swim in, you can't describe it because you just take it for granted and so we asked ourselves those questions and by making the film we're inviting other white Americans to ask those questions as well and it does feel like the bicentennial is a chance to say that northern amnesia is connected to a northern white self-righteousness and blind spots and what not, so I hope that folks will join us by using the film because it will be available for dialog purposes, schools, community groups and what not to invite particularly white Americans into this conversation of what is the legacy of slavery, what kind of repair is needed and to tackle these really heavy duty questions about reparations, apology, repair, the ongoing racial wealth gap, all sorts of inequities.



Another thing to share with you about our time at Sundance coming is that we're really honored that congressman Conyers is going to be joining us up there for Martin Luther King Day and we're going to have a panel where he can talk about HR40, so it's sort of a panel press conference. So that will be a chance to bring forward the bicentennial, the commission bill, to talk about how to get some funding for the commission bill so that this can all kind of come in concert, and that may be where I should stop. Yeah, just the inspiration of England and how much took place there in 2007 for their bicentennial and how many institutions came on board for that, I think can be a clarion call for us to do that kind of work here this year. Thank you.

[applause]

**EARLY:** Would you now welcome professor Dr. Ali Mazrui.

**ALI MAZRUI:** Thank you. Tough act to follow, quite interesting, fascinating. I hope I can also claim to be a student of Joe Harris.

[laughter]

Maybe not in the classroom but between book covers over the years. And I was very pleased to say yes when he wrote to me and asked me to join this event. The topic I offered him was the following; was the abolitionist movement the first war on terror? It's a work in progress, partly assisted by younger colleague called Thomas also, and we are trying to hammer out, if not a small book, well at least a major article.

Well of course terror is an old word, whereas terrorism is a relatively new contribution to political vocabulary. But in modern history the Atlantic slave trade was arguably the first intercontinental system of terror and we must distinguish here between systemic terror and episodic terror. Apartheid in South Africa was systemic terror, the whole system was terrorizing. September 11th was episodic terror, a major incident of devastating consequences. The third Reich in Nazi Germany was systemic, the attack on US embassy in Nairobi and were cases of episodic terror.

So the Atlantic slave trade was the first intercontinental system of terror in modern history encompassing not just the triangle of Europe, Africa and the Americas, but also consequences in other parts of the world. Although the Atlantic trade as a whole was an interconnected system of terror, it did have different phases and stages. This is the terror of the raid itself. Whole areas of Africa live in real terror that sort of fear many Americans felt on September 11 and 12th, when you're afraid not of being killed, but of being kidnapped and



never to come back again. And then the terror of the march to the sea in chains depending on where you were captured. The terror waiting in the fort for the next slave ship, sometimes in very crowded conditions and sometimes diseases breaking out. The terror of the middle passage across the Atlantic, the cruelties of geography in addition to the cruelties of history. The terror of the slave market and the prolonged terror of life on the plantation and the terror of changing ownership break up families depending upon whims and bargains between slave masters.

If the Atlantic slave system was a system of terror was the struggle against it a war on terror? So was the abolitionist movement a kind of counter terrorism? And here we must distinguish again between primary abolition is in, which is influxed by Africans in Africa who make the slave system increasingly unsustainable and efforts by enslaved Africans to rebel against their chains.

So secondary abolition is among the other hands efforts by citizens of this slave trading and slave owning nations through illegitimized first the slave trade, and later slave labor itself, as a step towards abolishing the whole system. On the whole historians have written far more about secondary abolitionism, that is abolitionism by those who are beneficiaries of the slave system rather than primary abolitionism, resistance by victims of abolitionism, and then in terms of actual military war on terror I'm glad we have discussed quite a good bit here about the Haitian revolution because a primary military war on terror as contrasted with the American civil war which was a secondary military war on this kind of terror, though it began with a concern about saving the union rather than emancipating the slaves, but it escalated in modern stature as it turned its attention more to the slave system. So if macro primary abolitionism is a revolution of the enslaved like the Haitians in 1804, macro secondary abolitionism is a war against slavery by people who would otherwise be beneficiaries.

Very often as in the case with the American civil war, a war between white people against other white people, but ultimately leading to the emancipation of black people. Also a case of macro secondary abolitionism was the use of the British navy on the high seas of the Atlantic to try and arrest some slaving ships and emancipate the enslaved and in some cases get them settled in West Africa in places like Sierra Leon. And then final issue, is the reparation, some of you may know, I and 11 other people who are sworn before heads of states in Africa in the 1990s who embark on finding out how to initiate a campaign for reparations.

This was in the days of the organization of African unity and we were encouraged by Chief Abiola who later was elected president of Nigeria and was not allowed to become one. We still every year attempt to have a session of the American





African scholars association devoted to the issue of reparations. But it is true one of the greatest difficulties is to convince black people that this is an issue worth worrying about. Emancipation and compensation for military terrorism today is already happening.

The most highly publicized was compensation at the Lockerbee accusations against the Libyans who eventually said, okay, okay, okay, we'll pay. And they're still arguing about the details and there are Americans who say we want to be compensated for Hamas, for Hezbollah events, etceteras, etceteras. So that you're treating contemporary terrorism as a legitimate area of reparations but there has been massive resistance including among black people themselves for treating reparations for centuries of enslavement as a legitimate area of reparations. Let me conclude with an anecdote which is relevant to Barack Obama. Ask themselves which country will be first to have a Luo president, Kenya or the United States?

[applause]

As you know both Barack Obama and ... are Luo and week ago we thought Kenya had just managed to beat the United States in having a Luo president but something happened and we've been fighting over it ever since. But I am concerned about one issue which was put on the table and I hope we can address it more fully and that is how to define an African-American.

In the case of Barack Obama, so neither of his parents were African-American but he was born an African-American, he was the first generation African-American in his line of family, but should we reject that definition? If we reject it we are facing the following paradigm. Whites used to have a white aristocracy claiming descent from the mayflower. Do we really want to have a black aristocracy claiming descent from the middle passage? If we don't then we should let people like Barack Obama be African-American in spite of being the first in his family, like Kunta Kinte. You'll have a chance to answer.

So we should permit Barack Obama to have no American parents and no black American parents and still be the first black American for reasons of frankness with regard to my own vested interest, I have five sons, none of them have a black American parent because I'm not a black American, their mother is not black American, but they are black Americans. They are black Americans and they feel as black Americans and they vote as black Americans and I would hate to see creation of conditions here that they are disqualified because Ali Mazrui and my first and second wives were not by birth or even by naturalization African-American. So let's try to be more inclusive even if we don't like Barack Obama.

[applause]



**EARLY:** Thank you. All right. Thank you for just wonderful, informative and brilliant and succinct presentations.

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