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Bachelor Thesis

Contextualising or relativising evil? A probe into US antebellum slavery

**Kontextualizace či relativizace zla? Sonda do otrokářského systému
amerického Jihu**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written the bachelor thesis *Contextualising or relativising evil? A probe into US antebellum slavery* by myself under the supervision of the thesis supervisor and that all the sources and literature used within the thesis are properly cited. I also declare that this thesis has not been used to receive another or the same degree.

Prague, 2018

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the abolition of antebellum slavery in the US through a leftist prism introduced by Michael Parenti. The first part provides a brief explanation of Parenti's theory on an example of the late Roman republic and its politico-economic background, which is depicted in *The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. In this part is also covered the historical precedent of slavery along with specific scientifically based arguments in favour of slavery developed by Samuel Cartwright. The last chapter gives a description of the process of abolition and eventually an analogy between Roman senatorial democracy and the antebellum slavery is established on a premise that in both the cases the privileged social class influenced historical narration of those events for its own benefit to cover its economic interests.

Keywords:

Michael Parenti, slavery, historical narrative, exploitation, Samuel Cartwright, the process of abolition

Abstrakt

Účelem této práce je prozkoumat zrušení otroctví v USA v období před občanskou válkou. Analýze je provedena skrze levicově orientované prizma představené Michaelem Parentim. První část práce představuje stručné vysvětlení Parentiho teorie na příkladu pozdní římské republiky a jejím politicko-ekonomickém pozadí, které je znázorněno v knize *The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. Tato část také pokrývá historické precedenty otroctví spolu se specifickými vědecky podloženými argumenty ve prospěch otroctví, se kterými přišel Samuel Cartwright. Závěrečná část popisuje proces zrušení otroctví. Závěrem vytváří analogii mezi římskou senátorskou demokracií a rasovým otroctvím v USA před rokem 1861. Tato analogie je postavena na premise, že v obou případech privilegovaná společenská třída ovlivnila výklad těchto dějin ve svůj prospěch, aby zakryla své ekonomické zájmy.

Klíčová slova:

Michael Parenti, otroctví, dějinné vypravování, vykořisťování, Samuel Cartwright, proces zrušení otroctví

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1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on one of the most pronounced cases of an abuse of human rights, namely racial slavery, which was a dominant economic system in the southern part of the United States and Caribbean islands during the 18th and 19th centuries. The aim of this thesis is to scrutinize a process of abolition of slavery whose first signs can be traced back to the very inception of the African slave trade. The main objective of the analysis is to explore whether there were any underlying causes, apart from the racially superior ideological argumentation broadly presented by proslavery writers, which would contribute to maintain such a social structure.

This specific point of departure is built around a more broadly defined premise presented by American left-wing political scientist Michael Parenti. According to him, the modus operandi of the process of the writing of history has always been affected by the prevailing class of a particular era. Furthermore, not only does this have an impact on the way history tends to be narrated, but it also effects our apprehension of historical events. This issue is addressed in Parenti's work titled *The Assassination of Julius Caesar* on which this thesis draws primarily. Through his book Parenti provides a different viewpoint on the topic of Roman late republic from the one that has been presented by gentlemen historians, as Parenti refers to privileged members of upper social classes who employ themselves in writing of history, as they presumably do so from their own social and ideological context. This somewhat biased interpretation is a reason why the overall picture of capitalism induces a notion of being conducive to democracy, while Parenti sees democratic development as happening in (often very aggressive and populist) response to feudal and capitalist oligarchy and privilege, i.e. in opposition to the elites, not in collusion with them. This bachelor dissertation attempts to render analogies between ancient Rome and the rhetoric that was used by slavery apologists and proponents in late 19th century US. What the analogies should indicate is that in both cases the prominent members of the society influenced how we perceive those events, in making them appear considerably less democratic (i.e. percolating up from grassroots) than they actually were. That is to say, it should imply that racial slavery was not a sui generis aberration, but the most palpable and jarring example of disenfranchisement and oppression of a certain segment of the working population.

The first chapter discusses the problem of historical narratives as such. As was mentioned earlier, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar* serves here as the primary source. The story of the oligarchs of Rome, who presumably abused their power in order to pursue their economic interests, is laid out with an emphasis on an act of treason during which Caesar was murdered. The reason why classist historians as well as ancient writers observed it not as treachery but as an obligatory task to save the Republic is also described. Caesar's murderers and their sympathizers presented this as a last-ditch attempt at saving senatorial democracy against a wanton tyrant, yet Parenti presents the very same event as a reactionary coup 'd'état that was meant to protect the privileges of senatorial oligarchy against a popular (and populist) ruler who pursued certain redistributive policies which affected these oligarchs. The purpose of this part is to illustrate to what extent historical narrative undergoes a dominant class' bias as long as it justifies its behaviour. This is understood as analogical to the elitist endorsement of antebellum racial slavery in the US.

The next part offers an analysis of a historical precedent of slavery as such. Different manifestations of subjugation are briefly explored, along with various ideological concepts supporting the institution of slavery. Examples listed in this section show that, even though throughout the history certain conditions of slavery varied, its core systemic elements remained intact. The actual distinctive features should be attributed only to a specific geo-political context. A special emphasis is put on a biblical justification of slavery, precisely on 'The Curse of Canaan', as it functioned as a cornerstone of racial slavery. Several secondary sources were employed, primarily a conservative southern magazine *The Southern Quarterly Review*, which was preferable by southern agrarians and often proslavery articles were printed there.

In the next section, racial slavery is presented partly as a sui generis case, because its apologists flaunted many scientifically based arguments by way of buttressing the Southern pigmentocracy. Anatomical research was conducted to explore the physiognomy of an African American with the intent of legitimating the unjust 19th century system and entrenched racial prejudice by scientific argument. A considerable effort was made in order to provide scholarly explanations for numerous aspects of misbehaviour as well as peculiar diseases which only black people seemed to suffer from. The main contributor on this topic was Samuel A. Cartwright who was publicly acclaimed for his zealous pursuit of defending the Southern interests against British imperialistic tendencies. Providing the analysis of individual proslavery arguments should allow us to see on what premises racial slavery was traditionally understood

as an isolated deviation rather than an extreme demonstration of a social struggle driven by economic interests.

Finally, the last part examines a process of slaves' emancipation while simultaneously attempting to synthesize Parenti's perception of history and the ongoing struggle among classes with Manisha Sinha's observations on the history of abolition presented in *The Slave's Cause*. It highlights the active participation of the enslaved in this process, an acknowledgement which they are frequently deprived of. Contradictory tendencies of capitalism and abolition are also stressed in this part, although according to conventional wisdom, they are regarded as acting in accordance. This serves as an antithesis to the preceding premise, as it looks at the antebellum racial slavery and its abolition as the most demonstrable segment of the grassroots struggle towards democracy, not a sui generis social aberration.

2. Slavery in the background of history

This chapter is divided into two seemingly unrelated subparts that deal with different issues. The first one being devoted to a brief presentation of Parenti's theory concerning writing of history, will provide us with a grounding for an eventual synthesis at the end of the paper. Parenti builds the issue of historical narrative on a society that highly relied on exploitation of slaves along with the proletariat (Parenti 27-32), so slavery as such is the common denominator of this section. The following parts are then dedicated to various aspects and forms of proslavery ideologies that established certain historical misinterpretation.

2.1. Issue of historical narrative

History as well as images of the past are written by winners. The voices of the losers are either muted or they come to us through various filters, according to Michael Parenti in his lecture on "The Assassination of Julius Caesar" (Parenti). The ongoing tendency is to judge this history. To observe the events that took place centuries ago and decide which side was good and which one was not. However, what we often fail to consider is the impact of historical narrative and its inevitable systemic biases. It already predetermines to some extent the outcome of our evaluation. For instance, let us take an eclectic look at historical events which are presented in favour of the prevailing side. Hannibal's abortive attempt to conquer the Roman Empire is a prime example. He is depicted as one of the ruthless invaders whose success could have had adverse effect on development of Europe since the Romans were in control of most of the old continent. What if we compare it with Roman conquest into France or the Britain islands? They are not likely to be seen so contemptible, yet the acts themselves do not differ that much. Is it because Hannibal and his kind tended to be portrayed as the villains who threatened the innocent or because trails of Roman hegemony have been appearing from time to time up to these days?

Michael Parenti addresses this issue in his work *The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. He often quotes various historians whom he titles as 'gentleman's historians'. Renowned volumes of those scholars would be then "indebted to an upper-class ideological perspective" (Parenti 15). Prominent authors such as Cyril Robinson, Jérôme Carcopino, Theodor Mommsen or Anthony Trollope would embrace Cicero, "that as an orator, a rhetorician, an essayist, and a correspondent he was supreme; that as a statesman he was honest, as an advocate fearless, and

as a governor pure” (Trollope 2). However, what they would not mention is his position as a slaveholder, a slumlord who owned a great amount of land and property, and a senatorial oligarch (Parenti 87). The reason for this acclaim is plain. Cicero represented dominant aristocracy, a prevailing part of the late Republic which outlived a whole line of populist leaders beginning with Tiberius Gracchus and ending with Julius Caesar.

2.1.1. Unpopular populares

Roman Senate whose members were self-appointed wealthy patricians and plebeians held almost absolute power in the late Republic slightly balanced by public assemblies. Yet this uneven distribution of power and economic means is as well considered justifiable, “those who bore the chief burden of fighting and financing the city’s wars should also possess the chief voice in directing the city’s course” (Robinson 24). Though this was not quite true. The senators did not pay taxes nor participated in wars, which was the task of the common people.

What made the Gracchi brothers, Caesar and the others so unfavourable in the eyes of the oligarchy was their effort to redistribute the wealth among the poor while simultaneously stripping the Senate of some amount of its unflinching power. To name just a few, he established settlements for the army’s veterans, distributed a great amount of land among poor families with children and ordered land holders to have at least one third of their labour force consisting of freedmen. Caesar himself “began to regularly bypass the Senate and deal only with the assembly” (Parenti 159). This has been seen in the eyes of Cicero as well as several historians as an abuse of power (Parenti 159) while in fact what Caesar did serve a different purpose. It is true that he accumulated power but only to distribute it among the people. He partially ignored the Senate as a non-democratic body since the members were not elected by public vote and dealt with the Tribal Assembly or the Plebeian Assembly.

2.1.2. Class bias in historical narrative

Let us now take a look at this event as a metonymy that could stand for the way in which history tends to be written. Julius Caesar has been largely portrayed as a dictator who did not hesitate to march into the city of Rome with his troops and seize power over the empire. A picture if not wicked then at least controversial. On the other hand, Cicero has been praised as a great orator, philosopher and a politician (Haskell 60), but his vices and blatant social biases

have been largely left unnoticed. A populist leader who willingly put an effort into actually providing for those in need and did not only act in accordance with the interests of aristocracy is matched with a member of the same class who publicly criticized this leader and his interventions, not solely because their beliefs were in conflict, but because these interventions threatened the position of the Roman oligarchy. When seen through such a Marxist prism, the interests of the most powerful and affluent social group are always the most prominent ones, since these people have means and resources to promote and address them. When historians encourage us to experience the events of the past through the eyes of people living in that era, they also forget to warn us that we may tend to explore such events only from the perspective of their dominant participants. The reason for such a false interpretation is because these participants have been the ones who have been writing history since the times of Ancient Greece, of Cicero, of Medieval Ages and so on and so forth. As Parenti puts it, “the writing of history has long been a privileged calling undertaken within the church, the royal court, the affluent town house, the government agency...” (13). Is it therefore possible that this issue is applicable also to the history of slavery in the USA?

2.2. Historical precedents of slavery

In order to fully understand the course of events that allowed ideology of racial slavery to be established, it is necessary to search in history for its predecessors in other historical epochs. As we will see, there are many similarities among different manifestations of slavery, all of which were flawed social systems with exploitative economic interests as an obvious common denominator. It can be the first indicator that the antebellum slavery was not a matter of racialist philosophy and theology or biological inferiority solely.

2.2.1. Ancient slavery

Throughout history, slavery was tightly linked with every significant era that appeared and in such period of time two groups of people had to exist. One that eminently benefited from free labourers and the other group that obviously consisted of the enslaved. There were numerous ways of how to become a slave and these ways were always adapted to a certain situation. When Ancient Greece and especially Rome were expanding their imperium and started to establish colonies in the lands they had conquered, a sufficient supply of soldiers was

necessary to oversee those colonies, to maintain peace there as well as in their homeland, to protect the imperium in general, but also to be ready to expand the borders even further. With such a demand of military forces it was essential, in order to sustain a continuous development, to acquire suitable workforce elsewhere. Subjugated people from colonies were first in line. Usually, they were transported to Rome as booty and sold on a market. Now, to buy a slave was no inexpensive matter so only a small percentage of population could afford it and this percentage consisted substantially of oligarchy (Parenti 29-31). Another way would be to fall deeply in debt and therefore submit oneself to the services of the creditor. Even though this person used to be a free Roman citizen, there would have been little to no difference between them and a captive slave. Living conditions in ancient cities were not hospitable for common people. They suffered from lack of food, struggled to provide for their children and also had to live under one roof with number of other families just so they could afford the rent. When the circumstances were no longer bearable they could do nothing but to borrow money from their landlord who would have been deliberately increasing the fees for accommodation to put his tenants into position where they had nothing else to offer except their lives. This debt circle was nothing unusual at that time and it entrapped many people who had no other choice. Of course, there would be cases when a debtor was at fault, but these rather seldom concerned common people. Here again it is absolutely evident who profited from this social adjustment. The affluent became even more wealthy and simultaneously the poor even more impoverished, consequently the widening social gap became further apparent.

Interestingly enough the first compelling evidence of writing in defence of slavery was found in a work of a reputed Greek philosopher Aristotle. In his *Politics* he portrays slavery as an arrangement by nature claiming that “he who is by nature not his own but another’s man, is by nature a slave... For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary but expedient; from the house of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.” (8). The basic distinction here is mirrored in rationality and capability of body to perform physically challenging labours. Slaves are described as intellectually deficient and therefore subjected to minds of prime freemen whose interests coincide since a slave is able to execute his master’s orders and as Aristotle mentions “[i]t is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and other slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right” (9). Critical voices appeared even at that time against this sort of a social layout, affirming that it is contrary to nature. The point made by those critics was that when one conquered land of another and as a result enslaved them, those slaves were formerly free women and men by nature. Aristotle

argues here that it is only a matter of justice and that a dispute should not be held over “the view that the superior in virtue ought to rule, or be master” (10), as long as this master’s virtue is accompanied with some sort of excellence. By the way, the same theme is to be found in Cicero’s speeches and writings, when he “assures us that Jews, Syrians, and all other Asian barbarians are ‘born to slavery’” (Parenti 35).

2.2.2. Medieval equivalents of slavery

If we move a few centuries ahead, we will come across yet another form of exploitation. In the Middle Ages society was divided into three basic groups. Those who ruled, those who prayed and those who worked. Ancient times were gone, one dominant imperium as well, somehow sovereign kingdoms were established and with that a new form of governance was put in practice, a monarchy. Among many things that had changed a position of common people had not been one of them, at least in terms of property, capability to determine their own future or political rights. Also, another matter which did not undergo any substantial change was the relationship between aristocracy and workers, although it was not called slavery anymore but serfdom.

The principle remained unaltered. The most powerful ones owned lands, in this case, a ruler and aristocracy, and had serfs to cultivate their fields or work in mines or forests. Serfs were obligated to obey their lord and in return were entitled to protection, equity and also had a right to use part of a crop for subsistence. On the other hand, they were bound to the land and could not leave it, could not relocate. When there would be an invasion from a foreign lord who would take over the land a serf would have to stay within a manor and work for a new lord. They could not marry outside the manor as “the serf-owners routinely intervened in serf marriage” (Bushnell 419), forbidding them to marry without permission. Serfs also had no legal rights towards the land they worked on, even though they were to some degree responsible for it. Interests of a lord obviously took precedence over interests of serfs, therefore in time of harvest, for instance, first they had to reap the lord’s crop and only then move to their own.

All the examples mentioned above are supposed to demonstrate a basic principle. In history there was a persistent endeavour of one class to capitalize on free unpaid labour of another class. To cloak this immoral act, numerous ideologies were developed to justify every mistreatment along the way. However, one thing which those ideologies failed to provide was a comprehensive explanation as to what the very essence of slavery stemmed from. All they

achieved was to shield immeasurable unfairness towards common people, which was supposedly enough. On the other hand, there was consistently at least one group of people who were not contented with this layout and those were slaves. If we take into account what Aristotle averred, that is to say that “the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master” (9), or another doctrine which shaped social discourse in the Middle Ages the three orders which interpreted a person’s position within society as divine agency, we should not expect any adamant waves of disturbances and yet they came. Spartacus’ rebellion is a chief instance of public disorder which was instigated by striving for liberty. Speaking of Romans, mind set of slaveholders in Rome was set to deem the slaves as inferior in moral and mental capacity (35).

When we, therefore, appraise the whole issue from another standpoint, letting the inhuman conditions fade into the background for a moment, we may conclude from volumes of sundry historians writing both from a prevailing social cast perspective or the disadvantaged one that slavery is the most prominent form of exploitation. Quoting Michael Parenti:

The degrading exploitation of one human being so that another may pursue whatever comforts and advantages wealth might confer. Ultimately, the same can be said of all exploitative class relations perpetrated by those who accumulate wealth for themselves by reducing others to poverty. (Parenti 43)

2.2.3. Biblical justification of slavery

To defend racial slavery, which was dominant especially since the 16th century up to the 19th century in Britain and its colonies and eminently in the USA, pro-slavery agitators came up with an explanation that had its roots in the biblical Scripture. They pronounced a passage from The Book of Genesis ‘The Curse of Canaan’ as a divine order.

[H]e said, ‘Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth’s territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.’ (*New International Version Bible*, Gen. 9.25-27)

According to the Old Testament Ham, the father of Canaan, saw Noe, Ham's father, in inappropriate and humiliating situation which infuriated Noe and thus he condemned Canaan to become a servant of his uncles as well as his own brothers. It is necessary to bear in mind however that the language of the Bible is highly symbolical and therefore when Noe mentions Canaan's brothers to whom he should serve, it does not exclusively mean his siblings rather than humankind. Then again, it is simply one of possible interpretations. Unfortunately, being so extensively based on symbols and plurality of commentary the human race has throughout the history witnessed a great number of feasible misuses and misinterpretations of sacred texts.

One of the most prominent defenders of slavery was Samuel Cartwright who wrote a great number of books which dealt with diverse issues ranging from biological inferiority of African people to supposedly unfeigned motives of Abolitionists from London and northern states in the USA, which were obviously economic (Guillory 211). Cartwright in his *Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race* thoroughly presents solid grounds to justify slavery. Among others he also reaches out for an explanation into the Bible. Those claims are later on supported by putative historical facts “[f]rom history, we learn, that the descendants of Canaan settled in Africa, and are the present Ethiopians, or black race of men” (*Report on the Diseases* 32). Not only can an interpretation of a religious text as a historical textbook be seen as dubious and misleading, it was also contested by a number of essayist or journal contributors denying any kind of proof to be found in Scripture which would confirm the idea (*Medical and Surgical Journal* 369).

On the other hand, Cartwright was not the only one who employed religious justification of racial slavery. In 1842 a second issue of Southern Quarterly Review came out with an article entitled *Canaan Identified with the Ethiopian*. Authors of this journal entry are in agreement with Cartwright proclaiming that “[t]he phenomena [...] are sufficient to identify the negro as the veritable Canaan mentioned in Scripture” (322). In addition, the same authors contributed specific organization of body and mind of Canaanite to an assignment which had occurred thousands of years ago. The specific anatomic modification thus should have helped to “convert the fields of the sunny South into pleasant places to him, and servitude into a species of enviable contentment and happiness” (*Canaan Identified* 323). To identify a certain population as descendants of a biblical character does not necessarily possess any detrimental impact, however, ascribing the same people tightly with an individual quality based on no historical evidence is where room for ideologically driven theories come to existence.

Cartwright continued with his defense “[i]s the Canaanite, or Ethiopian, qualified for the trying duties of servitude, and unfitted for the enjoyment of freedom” (*Report on the Diseases* 32). The whole nature of Ethiopians is questioned here, resembling arguments of Aristotle or the Medieval Church. It is no coincidence that in similar circumstances matter of inner characteristic features is challenged. They are arduous to be opposed to as they touch upon the core of a human being thus making them considerably appealing. The whole issue of person’s essence was in this case, besides other things, based on a “peculiar anatomic structure” (*Report on the Diseases* 32), which will be scrutinized later on.

Nature of the descendants of Canaan was associated with a lot more features of their lives which were naturally reflecting their living conditions. The lack of courage to set themselves free of oppression by taking their own lives, recognizing enemies of a master as their enemies, no desire for revenge on their masters and in general contentedness with their condition. All these were fallaciously attributed to their submissiveness (*Canaan Identified* 327). None of this was true. Not only was their hesitation in provoking any sort of disobedience caused by the constant worry about their families or by the unsettling prospect of being chased down by bloodhound dogs and bounty hunters, there in fact were slaves who would turn against plantation overseers when they would no longer bear inhuman cruelty towards themselves. Such outbursts were, however, not that common, especially because when captured those slaves would be sentenced to a severe punishment usually with the most tragic ending. It obviously very well served as a deterrent example which in return helped with the notion of people who did not complain about their state of affairs.

A picture of racial slavery as a fulfilled prophecy of Canaan’s progeny was also demonstrated on the aboriginal American who was supposed to be a descendant of Shem. The true reason why the new settlers could not force the Native Americans into bondage was supposedly a God’s decree. Those of Japheth lineage acted in conformity with the God’s order even without knowing it and they were compelled to carry it out. It is for this reason that the Natives could have resisted the temptation of selling their own brethren into servitude, whereas the Ethiopian “left his fastnesses in the wilds of Africa... and appeared on the beach to get passage to America, as if drawn thither, by an impulse of his nature, to fulfil his destiny” (*Canaan Identified* 326). The position of Canaan was therefore accounted to his own will, because as was derived from his name, he submitted himself, while the sons of Shem would rather die than serve as a slave.

Nonetheless, what served numerous scientists, doctors and scholars who zealously and persistently argued in favour of slavery was not solely a different reading. The whole theory was painstakingly backed up from the etymologic point of view also. Gesenius, a prominent Hebrew scholar provided translation and meaning of the names of Noah sons. In Coptic language which was spoken in Egypt until the 17th century the name Ham signified ‘hot, black or burnt black.’ Canaan would then in the Hebrew language stand for a ‘self-submissive kneebender’ (*Canaan Identified* 323). Admittedly, it is known the Hebrew names are derived from verbs and therefore, possible connection is suddenly apparent. However, the etymologic viewpoint played in fact a significant role which impact was not negligible. A lot of attention was given to the one single name at that time especially by those who did not feel complete trust towards fields of science “[t]he theologian need not go to the dissecting table, to look into the peculiar organization of the race of Canaan..., he can find them all condensed in the single Hebrew verb, which gave name to the race” (*Canaan Identified* 333).

One other thing deserves at least a brief attention. It is the logical scientific approach those authors and scholars took towards the subject. There was no direct connection established between innate subordination and population of the African continent which would originate in the Bible as there was no evidence for that. Those slavery apologists were aware of the lack of any provable conviction and hence came up with an indirect reference through a tenable intermediate step. The Bible speaks only about Canaan who is condemned to be a servant of servants but says nothing of a whole race being inferior let alone the Ethiopian. It is for this reason that discovering common features between the Canaanite and the Ethiopian was indispensable. It allowed attaching servitude to certain people.

What can we observe in the numerous reports, reviews, essays, scientific researches, etc. is a sophisticated and precisely carried out theory which attempts to conceal unequal social position of different classes, something very similar in antiquity as well as Medieval Ages. Nevertheless, the difference here is that this unjust behaviour is not towards the impoverished or politically feeble groups of people. It is aimed at a whole race which is supposed to be in servitude. It is no longer some people who are absent in mind but empowered in body as would Aristotle have said. It is a very concrete civilization which occupied a sizeable part of a continent. Unfortunately, what enhanced this disguise was authority of the Bible which played a significant role for citizens of the USA strictly based on a protestant moral code.

2.3. Cartwright's proslavery argumentation

Let us now move on a different aspect of a pro-slavery argumentation. As was mentioned above, slavery was supported by a great number of scientists among others and what is science without a positive solid evidence. By positive is meant something exact, measurable, captured by physical and mathematical laws of nature, because that is on what science establishes its discoveries. Theories based solely on biblical stories could not suffice. In addition, we can but assume that first there had been those discoveries and only then supporting statements were drawn, but such a succession is more than likely than the opposite one. What did, therefore, provide indisputable facts in this manner? As suggested in a following remark “[p]articuliar duties [...] required qualifications, and [...] organization differing considerably from the organization of any other people” (*Canaan Identified* 323), the suitable field appeared to be medicine and specifically anatomy.

2.3.1. Scientific approach towards slavery justification

Why was it so essential for racial slavery to find its ally within the scientific world, especially when previously every oppressive ideology had stem from either philosophico-religious doctrine or rather despotism of a ruling class? The world had changed. The perception and arrangement of the world had started to alter as soon as a modern construct of science had been introduced. This construct required any cognition to be derived from sensory experience and only then it can be processed through reason to eventually acquaint a piece of knowledge. It is, thus, apparent that without this sort of proof the whole ideology would have had lesser recognition among prominent people whose means and efforts were crucial for a community of slave holders. What antique philosophers sought in metaphysics and spiritual human core the Southern doctors provided with an autopsy and medical researches. It resulted into two outcomes. Public acknowledgment raised by trustworthiness of the physicians contributing to medical journals, periodicals or newspapers, and also “a mass exodus of Southern students from Northern medical colleges” (Guillory 210). That campaign was waged by Louisiana doctors and people from medical professions who criticized Northern teachers and doctors of complete ignorance and a lack of knowledge of diseases afflicting only slaves (Guillory 211).

The extent to which the campaign influenced the minds of Southern people should not be underestimated. Cartwright's strenuous efforts to steer the masses as well as other physicians and prominent personas not only in favour of racial slavery, but especially to stir up antagonism towards the North were recognized. A great number of publishers, editors and members of the medical profession joined Cartwright's cause to defend slavery as a positive good. A physician from Louisiana, William H. Holcombe, raised an issue of a separate Southern country. He asserted that the antipathy between the North and the South was too severe and irreversible not to have an impact on the entire state. The Southern nation perceived the institution of slavery as something just and righteous and it came to such a conclusion after it had studied anatomical, historical, ethnological peculiarities of the African. The first and only President of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis, also held Cartwright in high esteem and Cartwright's letters and journal contributions were commonly quoted and used in publications of other pro-slavery writers (Guillory 226).

Such a propaganda was not left unnoticed by abolitionists and anti-slavery communities both in the North and in London. To undermine power of their arguments and challenge Cartwright did not hesitate to accuse those critics of altering the Scripture or denouncing the Bible. As for those who questioned his conclusion that Negroes were descendants of Canaan, he mocked them for their ignorance and simple-mindedness if they had assumed that Canaan would have originally meant 'merchant' or 'trader' (*Medical and Surgical Journal* 370). Once again, examples above should help us to realize how influential Cartwright managed to become. Not only did he keep providing scientific explanations for every condition linked to the Africans, he also somehow moulded thinking of vast population. Obviously, he was not alone in the attempts, however, there were only few people who would bear such significance in the matter.

2.3.2. Medical discoveries establishing racial inferiority

The synergy between anatomical peculiarities and biblical prophecy worked flawlessly. The difference in organization of body made slavery "a happy condition" (*Canaan Identified* 339). The scientific discoveries concerning brain, nerves and internal organs were all fundamental for a concept of racial slavery as proper social order. By dint of its physiological structure, the body of a slave was in need of balance between his instincts, appetites, animality and intellectuality, which was presumably caused by smaller brain and simultaneously broader

nerves of spinal marrow connected with digestion and secretion (*Canaan Identified* 327). Such condition supposedly predetermined the Ethiopian to be the slave of his or her sensual propensities at the expense of intellectuality. Where the white Americans prevailed with reason, the argument continued, the Africans had to go with senses. Music would be a fine example. For a civilized person music is a matter of harmony conveying both an idea as well as sensual perception. For a slave subjected to animal instincts, it would bear no harmony, only melody, and it would please a body the same way food pleases a stomach (*Report on the Diseases* 30).

The following examples will help to illustrate how complex framework of medical discoveries was assembled to fully cover all features related to any condition that can be presented in the physiological body structure of African women and men in one way or another. These conditions justified slavery and specified a whole variety of ways of behaviour as in harmony with natural manifestation, even though in many occasions one might capture a notion that what is described as an underlying factor is in fact a result of mistreatment. Such is the case when Cartwright compares postural habits of slaves with those of the white Americans. He sees in the way they bend the upper body parallel to the ground resemblance as if a snake crawls on its stomach, which is complemented with a quote from the Bible when God casts away the Serpent with the words: “Upon thy belly shalt thou go” (*DeBow’s review* 67).

To start with the most evident distinguishing aspect - the colour of one’s skin - it is no coincidence that white man enslaved someone of a black skin. Mainly it turned out to be practical when identifying a slave. When there was a runaway prisoner there was a chance that he or she would escape unnoticed or at be at large until the news would spread. Whereas when someone noticed a person of a black colour wandering alone, it would raise suspicion, because a free black man or woman in the South was a rare exception. However, the issue of colour went even deeper. According to Cartwright, the difference of colour existed inside of the body also, “even the negro’s brain and nerves [...] are tintured with a shade of the pervading darkness” (*Report on the Diseases* 29). The image of darkness here resembles more than just a colour. Darkness is the very opposite of light and light is connoted with usually positive meanings such as ‘to enlighten somebody, bring to light, come to light, etc.’ Meanwhile dark or darkness has rather negative connotations. Impact of the language should not be underrated. When someone is said to have the brain of a shade of darkness, it might be considered as an insult, but when the same thing is said about an entire population the next step has to inevitable be some sort of prejudice. On the other hand, the very same colour had supposedly a positive

impact on the Ethiopians, because the blacker a person was, the healthier and stronger he or she was (*Report on the Diseases* 32).

Another area on which Cartwright focused with great industry were pulmonary organs. They were accountable for number of diseases traceable only in Africans but also for quantity of undesirable behaviour. By undesirable behaviour is meant apathy, idleness, disinclination to work, sleepy indolence. He claimed that atmospherization of the blood along with extended nervous system distributed to the key parts of a brain related to sensation and assimilation was the true cause why they have decided to dwell on misery and barbarism instead of “industry and frugality” (*Report on the Diseases* 30). Furthermore, by only slightly shifting the viewpoint Cartwright managed to explain the inability of slaves to take care of themselves in terms of governing even before they had been captured. He saw it as a reason for inclining to a powerful chieftain or a shaman whose role in a tribe resembled those of a master. Cartwright suggests that even set free slaves would still prefer the form of government as their ascendants, therefore, a slave would always seek a white man to rule over him or her “as it gives them more tranquillity and sensual enjoyment” which on the other hand is “fatal to mental and moral progress” (*Report on the Diseases* 30), if combined with the indolence. Nevertheless, the idea does not stop here. It continues further and deprives the enslaved Africans of any possible release from the lot. According to Cartwright their “organization of mind” would prevent them of maintaining liberty due to lack of “the industry, the moral virtue, the courage and vigilance” and thus sooner or later they would slip back again into barbarism or slavery (*Report on the Diseases* 30).

Drapetomania

Probably the most impactful discovery Cartwright made was exploring the underlying cause of why slaves kept running away from their masters who were said to be their “friends and protectors” (*Report on the Diseases* 32). It had to strike the plantation owners and the overseers of those plantations why would slaves run away if they need the white man. Under his rule they were able to labour and exercise which resulted in proper atmospherization of blood which led to better physical condition and that was only one of many putative benefits. So why deprive yourself of such a vital asset? Cartwright seemed to find an explanation in an illness called ‘Drapetomania’ also known as ‘the disease causing slaves to run away.’ This disease would affect the mind of a person and was triggered by improper governing of slaves. It did not truly matter whether a master had a reputation for being good or bad, but his power to maintain order and discipline.

Firstly, what was the correct way to treat slaves, so they would not strive to escape from the oppression? Essentially, it was necessary not to oppose the God's will, that is not to make slaves anything more than 'the submissive knee-bender.' A master could not put himself on a par with his slaves in any measure. The relationship had to be permanently clearly distinguishable in terms of who was inferior and who was superior. That being said, the white man was disallowed to abuse the power given to him by God. Severe cruelty, inappropriate punishment, neglecting the basic needs and necessities, all these might have caused a slave to run away. As Cartwright states, "two classes of persons were apt to lose their negroes; those who made themselves too familiar [...] and those who treated them cruelly" (*Report on the Diseases* 34). Were those conditions met, a slave would have been bound by the biblical prophecy to serve Japheth and his descendants. If, however, first symptoms such as sulkiness and dissatisfaction appeared, the overseers were obliged to take a precaution, so the disease would not culminate. This preventive measure received an expressive name "whipping the devil out of them" (*Report on the Diseases* 35).

Dysaesthesia Aethiopsis

Apart from drapetomania, yet another illness was understood as prevailing among free black people who lived in communities rather than enslaved ones. In this case a body would be also affected along with the mind as there were accompanying physical signs and lesions. This disease Cartwright decided to call 'Dysaesthesia Aethiopsis' (*Report on the Diseases* 35) and for the slave owners was similarly troublesome as the former. A great number of disturbances and detriment to property owners was accounted to "the stupidity of mind and insensibility of the nerves induced by the disease" (*Report on the Diseases* 35). What provoked this condition seemed to be an outcome of natural sense of liberty of black people, however, from the biased physiological perspective it once again stemmed from deprivation of oxygen in their blood, which led to brain being dysfunctional and unable to provide enough energy to the body to take proper care of itself. Interestingly enough, Cartwright actually suggests that the slave who indulges in breaking tools, damaging crop or misbehaving is not to be blamed, on the contrary, it is the disease only which is at fault, as we can observe in Cartwright's description, "there is no premeditated mischief in the case, the mind is too torpid to mediate mischief" (*Report on the Diseases* 35). Although it did not mean a lot for slaves for two reasons. First of all, it only amplified the theory that they cannot be left alone without no one to look over them and to govern them, because their natural state of mind would throw them into deep misery and

idleness, and thus consequently make them unfit to provide for themselves. Secondly, a cure for this particular complaint again incorporates physical punishment only worded differently, “anoint it all over with oil, and slap the oil in with a broad leather strap” (*Report on the Diseases* 37).

2.3.3. Britain as a threat to Southern economy

If we look at Cartwright’s letters, publications and papers, he most profoundly agitated for slavery from medical perspective being a physician. Nevertheless, it was not his sole point in the argument. As many others, he was well aware of the economic impact slavery had on the US, especially on the agricultural South. Finally independent America was trying to secure its competitiveness among traditionally dominant European monarchies mainly Britain. Free labour provided by slaves chiefly contributed to the production of cotton, corn or sugar. Cartwright felt that the intensions of British abolitionists to terminate slavery in Southern states were not only hypocritical, “the British West India planters, shall have a monopoly of slave labor for their pains, and shall monopolize the slave trade also” (*East India* 451), but largely as a cloaked agenda to eliminate a powerful opponent in cotton trade area “[the] attempt now making [Great Britain] to supercede us in cotton, is well worthy of serious attention” (*East India* 447). He saw East India Company as the main competitor in agricultural industry and thus the efforts of abolitionists considered not as acts of humanity but as selfish attempts to destroy the competition on the world market. In general, Cartwright considered the London Anti-Slavery Society to be a part of the British plot, which should have contained inducing antipathy by the Northern states towards the institution of slavery.

2.4. Antebellum slavery as a sui generis aberration?

To bring this part of the thesis to an end, what conclusion can be drawn from the reports of Samuel Cartwright? There was a prevailing notion mainly in the South of the United States that slavery was a natural social order and that white people not only had the right to control people from Africa, they were even obliged to rule over them as it was seen as beneficial to all sides. Masters would profit from it by free labour force, slaves by being taken care of and finally the rest of the world as bales of cotton produced by slaves would afford people a cheap clothing and thus allow them to spend money elsewhere (*Report on the Disease* 38). It is obvious who

made the most of it. Similarly to the ancient Rome, to preserve slavery was the main interest of the wealthiest who possessed majority of plantations as well as slaves. Therefore, it can be hardly argued that racial slavery was a sui generis deviation, as it is often described.

Admittedly, there were differences from what we have seen in Rome, Greece or medieval Europe, on the other hand, these dissimilarities can be perceived as manifestation of its own era. It was convenient to enslave Africans and bring them to America. They presumably endured much more physically demanding work, they were used to hot climate and staying under the sun, more than the Native Americans. However, it had nothing to do with their anatomy, skin colour or race, rather than their way of life. Had there been no European imperial push in Africa, and the transatlantic slave trade, or had it happened a few centuries later, there might have been no racial slavery in the America. Despite that, the inequality between people would have expressed itself in a different manner along with the necessity of the privileged to sustain such disparity. In doing so, they had to persuade rest of the society to actively participate in the affair. This scheme, this pattern, is now very familiar from other forms of politico-economic subjugation. That is why the peculiarity of American racial slavery is not in its ideological concept nor in the social structure it promoted but it lies in the form in which it was realized. It should be added, although that as far as slavery goes each concrete realization was unique.

By what means the prominent class of people in the US managed to affect the social discourse should be now apparent. From what we know about history and the way it is described, it seems that there has always been at least one chief factor which has served as a motivation and justification for people. Economic interest seems to be the one. Striving for prosperity apparently works reliably when persuading others. It goes as far back as to tribal organizations and it has remained within us. Behind almost every prominent historical event which has shaped the world, there has been the want to maintain a certain living condition or improve it. Let it be wars, treaties, explorations, migrations, each time there would be the economic factor. Question is, in case of the institution of slavery, to what extent it compelled people to treat the enslaved as inferior.

3. Democratic reassessment of abolition

3.1. Abolition of slavery – a case in point

The last part of this thesis will use the Marxist interpretive prism (namely the populist/elitist dichotomy) in order to explore the abolition process, thereby providing us with a different understanding of the institution of slavery. Until now, only brief description of general reasoning of pro-slavery defenders has been given. If their convictions are to be considered solely from the ‘racial superiority’ perspective, we could say that they have been already overcome by the majority of population. We have the liberty that we do not have to accumulate contra arguments against that ideology, as many others have already done it for us. On the other hand, there is the opportunity to focus on slavery, same as on its abolition, in a way that it is not often perceived. From the Michael Parenti’s interpretation of ancient Rome’s late republic, there should be a conscious effort not to read any instance of subjugation purely as an isolated occurrence of what usually were religious or philosophical beliefs. Such cases can be approached as an everlasting struggle between those at power and the impoverished, let it be the working class, serfs or slaves. What role in all this has the abolition movement?

Many modern historians debase those anti-slavery revolutionaries to activists whose attempts were terminated when the prohibition of slave trade and slave owning was accomplished. However, their critique did not stop at the plantation owners. Their fight extended even further, to the working sector of the exploited classes. Though, this historical fact is not the only thing which is not frequently remarked. Seldom do historians avow the amount of credit that black abolitionists, former slaves, have on the success of the whole process. As Manisha Sinha in *The Slave’s Cause* mentions “[s]lave resistance, not bourgeois liberalism, lay at the heart of the abolition movement” (1).

3.1.1. Role of slaves in the process of abolition

What importance does it bear, whether historians exclude some fragments of a complex mosaic of events and figures as long as the total outcome remains untouched, we may ask. It surely is a most challenging task to assembly all the parts of a historical event, when there is such an abundance of voices to be listened to. While that is true, having numerous sources helps to make a broader picture of an issue. Nevertheless, omitting to concede rebellions and judicial

participation of the enslaved as a catalyst of what became a substantial social change in the Western world is one thing. To whom were the achievements ascribed is something different. Historians tend to award the middle-class as the most prolific agitators of the cause and without their engagement within the movement would be unsuccessful. In Sinha's work is that approach addressed repeatedly "[c]ontrary to conventional wisdom, abolition was hardly a middle-class affair" (253) or suggesting that to view the abolition as "imitative, mired in the strictures of middle-class reform and elitism" (2), should be misleading. Not so rare would be the case when signatories of various petitions denouncing slavery could not write their names and, therefore, signed with an 'X' indicating that early stages of black abolitionism were not class oriented.

At the very beginning of the anti-slavery agitation did not stand any enlightened middle-class man who would advocate setting slaves free, releasing them from chains, because he could not stand them being treated horribly. Along with members of the Quaker movements, who played an irreplaceable role in pursuit of banning slavery and who have been publicly acknowledged for their merits, there were also African Americans who trod the path for the first abolitionists "[s]lave rebellions complemented pioneering antislavery protests by Quakers and other Protestant dissenters in British North America" (Sinha 10).

So, it was slaves who had exposed themselves in the first line since the inception. Their active resistance and rebellions went hand in hand with atomistic criticism of slavery. They did not hide behind white abolitionists who publicly defended fugitive slaves and helped them with individual manumissions. Instead, blacks found a powerful ally that could promote their cause and bring in a political ladder to persuade the white population. In fact, they inspired Quakers and other communities to establish themselves as leading agitators in the process of emancipation. Separating runaway slaves, black community leaders or writers out of the final shape and ends of the movements would mean misreading a most prominent event in the history of struggle against oppression. By and large, abolitionism was built on black resistance.

Two main factors brought keen interest of the first defenders of slaves. Firstly, the damage caused by the Atlantic slave trade to African nations as well as the inhuman nature of the trade. Secondly, and that applied especially in England, runaway slaves who sought justice in front of the English court based on colonial precedent. That made Granville Sharp to take part in enforcing "English notions of law and liberty to Africans" (Sinha 10). Not only did slave rebellions motivate Quakers to fight even more persistently and emphasized their endeavour, furthermore, there were cases when they managed to convince slave owners to cease to support

slave trade in their colonies. James Oglethorpe, a member of a slave-trading society, Sinha writes, restricted establishing slavery in his colony, as he respected the growing number of fugitive slaves (Sinha 18). Perhaps even more compelling evidence of the persuasive power which was presented with a personal experience with slaves' consistent devotion to their emancipation is a story of Elizabeth Freeman. After she had been set free, she maintained certain relation with Theodore Sedgwick's family, who had represented her at the court. Her dedication to antislavery principles was highly admired by the Sedgwicks who eventually got involved in the abolition movement (Sinha 70).

To illustrate the earliest efforts of abolitionists who had decided to actively participate, being induced by the factors mentioned above long before first official societies were established, two names should be introduced. Anthony Benezet, a teacher, writer and a member of the Quaker sect established a school for blacks in Philadelphia and started to teach there (Anthony Benezet). The truth is that Benezet had partaken in the antislavery campaign by writing countless letters and antislavery pamphlets before he was personally exposed to the devastating effect the slave trade on African nations, but the interaction with slaves and their individual experience which they were able to share had a significant influence on his writings. His ideas somehow overextending the core of Quakerism and Enlightenment are combined with his romanticized picture of Africa (Sinha 21). Benezet's work eventually led to establish the first Anglo-American abolitionist movement. His story can be well used to demonstrate that people were not indifferent the horrors of slave trade which they were told by the slaves who lived through it, on the contrary, being aware of the inhuman conditions, those people devoted themselves even zealously.

Another person whose involvement was preceded by slaves' own incentive would be already mentioned Granville Sharp. He represents a British counterpart to Benezet. Sharp's story starts with a slave named Jonathan Strong whose master David Lisle of Barbados abandoned him in the streets of London. Sharp along with his brother took care of Strong and when after several months Lisle appeared to reclaim his slave and to sell him, Strong beseeched Sharp's help. Sharp defended Strong's case successfully and consequently the slave was set free (Fischer 382). Perhaps even more renowned case for its transcendent impact on eventual emancipation was *Somerset vs. Stewart*. Sharp argued here that English law did not recognize slavery within a common law only in its colonial form. The result was that slaveholders could not "forcibly transport their slaves from England" (Sinha 22). The way through which is Sharp embroiled in the dispute once again accentuates the weight attached to slave resistance.

3.1.2. North versus South in the process of abolition

The process of emancipation itself differed accordingly to the economic situation of locations at which it took place and even though the North responded somewhat positively to abolition campaign, it did not go as planned. Instead of full emancipation, there were cases of individual manumission, or gradual emancipation, which required slaves to serve their masters until they reached adulthood, as was stated in the Vermont's constitution "no man could be bound to servitude after the age of twenty-one years" (Sinha 67), for women the limit would be eighteen years. Despite all this, the North became distinguishably safer place for black people than the South. One of the possible explanations why the process came to a halt in the South would be its higher economic dependence on agriculture. The main income of the Southern states came from trade with agricultural products such as cotton or tobacco. The fact that business with tobacco registered a decline led to series of manumissions in the affected areas of the upper South. On the other hand, the rise of cotton industry triggered another wave of slavery. Sinha calls it a 'second slavery' as it provoked "its antebellum career of economic expansion and political consolidation" (Sinha 97).

Contrary to the Southern economy, the North was much more affected by industrialization, so it was more like to incline to emancipation of slaves, as it was not so prone to suffer from an outflow of labour force. By and large, the Northern states were not driven by slavery, although there were cities like New York which relied on slave work. Therefore, it would be a fault assumption to think that a subsidized economic interest led to the first instances of emancipation. In fact, it was the economic motives that weakened the resulting effect of emancipation as the northern slaveholders made "lawmakers solicitous of slaveholders' property interests" (Sinha 67).

Furthermore, northern factory owners and former slaveholders did not embrace the idea of a fellow black citizen. As far as they were concerned, those capitalists would rather solve the increasing demand of a complete emancipation raised by abolitionists by sending former slaves back to Africa. To a land which was no more of a home to black people than America. Colonization of Africa instead of emancipation was promoted by no one but the privileged class. Securing a proper citizenship was an essential part of abolitionists' plans. Among those who did imagine African Americans blending into white American society was, for instance, Thomas Jefferson (Sinha, 104), who personally possessed slaves or Thomas Branagan, who also used to be a slaveholder. Branagan had been initially in favour of emancipation, but he

eventually diverged from this path and sought to “welcome hardy and laborious immigrants from Ireland and Germany rather than free blacks” (Sinha 112).

3.2. Capitalism in opposition to abolition

It seems to be a common tendency to link early capitalism in the United States with growing emancipation of blacks. Eclectically selected examples from the history of abolition which are introduced on previous pages show us that it is far from being true. Not only can we see that it was not in concordance with economic interests of capitalists, i.e. representatives of modern aristocracy, but they also did not take any proactive measures to support abolition. All they did was only forced reactions to no longer sustainable antislavery rumblings. What was achieved during the antislavery campaign is to be attributed to both the enslaved and unflagging dedication to obtain freedom and multiple abolition movements consisting of people of various social classes. Following paragraphs should elaborate on how explicitly the discrepancy between capitalist society and abolitionist principles was portrayed.

3.2.1. Capitalism as a system profiting from slavery

Firstly, even though general knowledge might be that capitalism is associated with urban areas where industrialization spread rapidly, and with first manufactories or factories, its roots can be traced back to rural surroundings and agricultural production, hence in the US context, to southern states. Even there the most obvious features of capitalism were preserved, meaning the property relations between those who physically worked the land and those who owned the workers, or more precisely, their labour. Within those measures, slavery was unique in the way that the producers, slaves, were possessed effectively by the capitalists, i.e. slaveholders. The implication that inevitably emerges from this arrangement is that capitalism could not propel slavery to its termination. On the contrary, the exploitation of work was grounded on the unequal working terms, as Manisha Sinha words it “[t]he growth of capitalism proved to be a bulwark of slavery rather than its *bête noir*” (Sinha 254).

Nevertheless, this was not a sole indicator that marked the dissonance amid emancipation process and capitalism. From its very inception, Quaker abolitionism showed a strong disapproval of capitalism as an instrument of “commercialization of the faith” (Sinha 12), as they credited it to corruption of one’s religious beliefs. Besides, boycotts of goods which

were products of slave labour, such as sugar or tobacco, were not rare. Interestingly enough, this was a new method of a non-violent protest, which is nowadays commonly used, often to raise public awareness of a not so distinct exploitation issues. That also shows us the character of the movement and how it transcended its racial equality core to something more extensive. It is no wonder that abolitionism was favourable among the masses and that more sympathy was not received from upper-middle class factory owners, but from workers. It formed in it a strong opposition and intensively criticized current social hierarchy along with market conditions, two cornerstones of capitalism. Black abolitionists reacted similarly to their Quaker counterparts and instead of “sing[ing] paeans to American republicanism”, they opted for “a radical critique of early capitalism” (Sinha 151).

What American abolitionists did, was that they managed to establish within their critique of capitalism a conjunction which bridged antislavery principles with the struggle of labouring class. They soon enough interconnected those two issues related to mass population and started to share ideological discourse. Labour class activists borrowed the term ‘wage slavery’ to depict appalling work conditions in factories and even for them slavery represented “the benchmark of oppression” (Sinha 347). Those sympathies were mutual as Quakers recognized the burden of labour. Both sides were well aware that the oppression of slaves as well as exploitation of workers were two sides of the same coin, quoting William Dexter Wilson, they were both “subject[s] to the will of the monied few” (Sinha 347). What started as a fight for liberty of blacks escalated to a movement supporting the ten-hour-a-day campaign, proper working conditions and wage.

3.3. Parenti’s theory reflected in antebellum racial slavery

Let us now try to link Parenti’s observations of the late republic of ancient Rome with the most extensive process of emancipation which took place hundreds of years ago. We should be able by now to see similarities and features in common that appear in both the historical epochs.

Firstly, the most prominent resemblance is the social arrangement of the US antebellum society which is analogous to the one of ancient Rome. The layout which is portrayed here consists of two self-disdaining social classes. Those who are oppressed and those who exploit the oppressed. In this case the former being slaves and eventually the working class whose cause blended into the original abolitionist movement and the latter being slaveholders,

plantation owners and factory owners, capitalists of that day. Similarly to the ancient society, the number of people representing the underprivileged largely exceeded the number of landowners, therefore again, it was a struggle between masses and the affluent. When referring to black people as “extraneous mass” (Sinha 208), which is the expression used by James Cornish, who wished not to share a land whit liberated African Americans, it reminds us of a term employed by Roman writers as well as classical historians when describing the poorest – the mob. Both Scullard and Juvenal, a British historian and a Roman poet respectively, for instance referred to the poorest as “the fickle, idle urban mob” or “the mob of Remus” (Parenti 208).

The next thing we can compare is the ideological cloak that was applied in order to cover what presumably were purely economic motives the pursuit of power. Justification of Roman slavery stemmed from philosophy of ancient thinkers, Aristotle being the most prominent one, while what provided for pro-slavery propaganda was a complex theory which relied on scientific findings next to discoveries based on specific interpretation of the Bible. Even though there are some evident contrasts they should be attributed to a historical era in which they were introduced. By and large, those theories aimed at the same thing, slavery as a natural condition of a certain group of people. Who represented the naturally subjugated was solely in the hands of the privileged and it coincided with their economic interests. Essential function of the slavery propaganda was its targeting at those who lingered just above the poorest and individually did not pose any threat to the elite. However, without their silent indifference such social stratification as slavery would be arduous to sustain.

According to conventional wisdom, capitalism stands at the roots of widespread of democracy and democratic elements. A picture of a prosperous satisfied aristocrat (the term aristocrat is topical despite the fact that the political system in the majority of western capitalist societies is not oligarchic or autocratic but democratic, for it is the social arrangement that constitutes the name and not vice versa) who condescends to extricate the poorest from their burdensome situation is a common one and supported by the institutions of Church, government or school. From what we have witnessed in the process of emancipation it is clear that the antislavery movements and, consequently, the labour movements represented the fight between democracy and aristocracy. American abolitionists were aware of this political ideological overlap, that is to say, they understood the war they waged against slaveholders was not bounded by the slave-master oppression rather than property and money distribution within society. William Garrison, a prominent social reformer, and one of the founders of the

American Anti-Slavery Society, published a severe critique of financial capitalism which concentrated in Wall Street, “[i]t is rightly named – *Wall Street* – for those who habitually occupy it in quest of riches at the expense of mankind, are *walled in...*” (Sinha 349).

If we were to draw a hypothetical line connecting prominent historical events that were somewhat associated with liberalization, imposing popular policies advantageous to working classes, we would see that they were not accomplished in accordance with vast capitalist representation, but in opposition to it. Seldom were, for example, not only proslavery campaigners but also northern politicians and prominent members of society who did not directly support slavery in favour of equal civil rights for African Americans a clear mark of democracy. They would rather see them back in Africa as they were afraid of ongoing rebellions and liberating tendencies which could threaten growing capitalism. What we now consider as processes conducive to democracy, expanding it, deepening its principles within society should be perceived as antagonistic towards capitalism. Introducing minimum wage policy, shorter working hours, working conditions, creating trade unions, all these reflected the economic needs of the larger population and they were driven by people of the bottom line of social hierarchy. That coincides with the way American abolitionism was led. Therefore, racial slavery can be seen not as an individual instance of oppression as it is nowadays conventionally described, but rather as the most pronounced case of a long-lasting struggle of society.

Finally, the question of historical narrative. Why would we see liberal capitalist society creditable for what has been described above? Why would “historians detect similarities between the proslavery argument and the socialist criticism of capitalism” (Sinha 365), when for contemporaries there was a visible difference? In *The Assassination of Julius Caesar* Michael Parenti suggests that the process of writing history has always been in hands of privileged institutions, let it be the Church, government, universities and so on (13). People positioned in those institutions provide a biased perspective of history as they write in accordance with their social status and ideological context. The picture of history drawn by the prominent people is thus always in favour of its authors. When racial slavery was eventually condemned as one of the greatest abuses of human rights, capitalist attributes associated with slavery were oftentimes left out. The reason for it is that while trade with people and factual possessing of them is publicly denounced and banned, that part of society which was prevailing during the 18th and 19th is still in power and influences the kind of history produced.

4. Conclusion

The main objective of this bachelor dissertation was to analyse the institution of antebellum slavery in the US through a leftist prism inspired by a left-wing political scientist Michael Parenti. The point of departure was an assumption suggesting that racial slavery should not be perceived as an isolated example of an abuse of human rights, despite the fact that very blatant suppression of basic rights is inevitably associated with it. Instead, it should be regarded as the most apparent case of class exploitation. Furthermore, the paper also aimed at providing a possible explanation of why, according to conventional wisdom, racial slavery, and its abolition as well, tend to be depicted in opposition to historical accuracy.

To accomplish the outlined goals, it was first necessary to illustrate where Parenti's assumptions stem from. His argument most famously rests on the metonymic cautionary tale of the seemingly democratic republic of ancient Rome. His thorough examination then laid out a theoretical grounding for the main objective by illustrating actual motives that led senatorial oligarchs to successively eliminate a whole line of 'populares', political leaders who focused on the cause of the commoners, to the detriment of economic interests of their own class. What started with the Gracchi brothers terminated with the last breath of Julius Caesar. The motives of this treason, that is to say a murder of an innocent popular leader who devoted himself to improving living conditions of the poorest, outline several principles. Firstly, there exists a class of oppressive aristocrats who do not hesitate to take any necessary precautions to maintain, from their perspective, a favourable social layout. Secondly, this privileged class is in control of producing historical narrative, interpreting certain chains of events with a plausible appearance of protagonists of such events. Consequently, this approach is sustained throughout the history among prominent historians who write within the same ideological and social perspective as their antique predecessors. Finally, it demonstrates the need of a compelling ideological cover that would justify the exploitation of the underprivileged as a natural social order. The three principles mentioned above were then applied on the case of racial slavery.

The subsequent chapters explored a tentative antithesis to Parenti's position, as they sought to highlight the most distinct peculiarities of the US antebellum racial slavery system. In doing to, the most idiosyncratic proslavery arguments were analysed through various sources of Southern writers, particularly those written by Samuel Cartwright. The purpose of this analysis was to provide an illustration of how complex protection of the institution of slavery was built in order to cloak the main catalyst of this instance of subjugation, which was economic

interests and political power. It was not sufficient to simply state that black people were inferior, but a thorough scientific research had to be conducted to legitimate pigmentocratic slavery. However, similar to the biblical arguments, which were also examined in the paper, the anatomical discoveries that indicated any biological inferiority of black people in contrast to whites had been already refuted by the time they were made by Cartwright and others, indicating that the medical findings were a fraud deliberately concocted to deceive people and to distract their attention. This thesis offers an explanation that all this was committed so that a particular social class could possess the majority of land and property. The same systemic patterns can be traced in Parenti's analysis.

The final chapter dealt with the process of the abolition of slavery, attempting to explain that social development through Marxist analysis espoused by Parenti and Sinha. The remaining principles mentioned above were demonstrated there, mainly the question of socially lopsided historical narrative. It is no coincidence that slaves are conventionally omitted from the process of emancipation, even though their active participation was crucial in their fight for liberty. The reason for an omission of African Americans from this story is that it again favours the prominent members of society in the 19th century, typically represented by industrial and economic elites. They stood for what we now understand as a capitalist, since they possessed a majority of real estate and thus made themselves indispensable as employers and landlords. Basically, without them it was extremely arduous to make for a living in the Northern states. In the South, slaveholders were an equivalent to factory owners, to some extent.

First of all, if African Americans are crossed out of the abolition movement, it prevents people from fully comprehending the course of events, thus leaving them susceptible to ideological manipulation. Capitalist society presents itself as being conducive to democracy, taking credit for implementing democratic measures such as abolition of slavery, but as we can see in the final part, it can be argued that capitalism relied on slavery even when it had presumably become an outdated system. In other words, capitalism profited from a social arrangement where one part could factually own other persons, so it could efficiently exploit their labour. However, in contrary to capitalism, slavery has been publicly condemned and is nowadays considered illegal. And yet, the economic and political system that effectively preserved that condemned institution as long as possible is not only permitted, but it is the most widespread system in use in the world. Hence, it is only logical that it needed to gloss over or mute all signs of complicity and participation in the historical record.

In conclusion, the main objective of the thesis was to attempt to provide a picture of antebellum slavery in the US as the most pronounced case of class exploitation, regardless of its excessive and brutal idiosyncrasies which are typically presented as unparalleled and unprecedented social aberrations. This effort was achieved through a synthesis of two comprehensive class perspectives which touch on the topic of social struggle and oppression in particular societies.

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