

Food Injustices: Molasses to MoonPies, Farm to Fork

Part One- How Southern Sugar Plantations Created Systemic Racism

Racism with non-white persons corrupted American life from the first settlement on Indigenous land. In previous history, invasive military campaigns had gained slaves as a byproduct of *political* conquest. But Black Africans were enslaved specifically for *economic* enrichment of southern land owners. Sugar plantations with free slave labor were an extractive economy for land and human beings. For 11 million slaves who were stolen from Africa on approximately 35,000 ships for about 250 years, 15% were women, and 20% children.

Systemic racism developed from beliefs that anything other than whiteness was biologically inferior; genetically and behaviorally. That belief system became an ideology imbedded in pulpits, households, sweet treats, laws, bogus science, and 'white only' water fountains. Immoral beliefs of 'superior' white plantation owners deliberately erased the ethnic, tribal, and cultural backgrounds of African Blacks, to elevate white Eurocentric language, dress, religion, and traditions.

Queen Sugar yielded enormous profits for southern white colonists. And in 'off season' (June to September), slaves were 'rented out' to neighboring towns for such work as road building and land clearing. The slave labor subsidy also resulted in greater scales of production that allowed dramatically lowered sugar prices. What had previously been an exotic treat for the wealthy, became an affordable, available consumer item, thanks to a slave workforce.

Plantation sugar production was an expensive proposition. Unlike other southern crops, sugar required field to boiler transfer in a few days to avoid spoilage. Younger slaves worked the fields for a few harvests, 'seasoning' their bodies. Only the healthiest and strongest adult males could endure intense working conditions of the refinery. Seasons lasted about 150 days straight, day and night, late Oct to early May. Work was 7 days, 14 hours a day; where temperatures in the refinery could reach 140 degrees. The schedule was so strenuous that prime workers usually lasted for 7-9 years, due to injury, illness, or death. Many sugar producing areas recorded fewer births than deaths.

The U.S. did not free their slaves until 1865, but in 1808, it banned the import of foreign (including African) captives. To then replace a diminishing slave labor force due to ageing, Louisiana's sugar plantation owners and bankers devised a way to finance the slaves they bought, often from the coastal states. Planters pledged their
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land and slaves as collateral to banks, to borrow a portion of that value to buy more slaves and/or more land. Since lenders and investors were hesitant to make bundled loans based upon the perishable lives of the slaves, each Southern State guaranteed these slave-mortgage-backed securities. They then sold them to British investors, which funded sugar's (White Gold) expansion in the 19th century. Cities like New Orleans became the Walmart of slave sales.

The deep institutional roots of systemic racism first developed in the southern states, and then spread across America in various insidious ways. Principles and practices of racial corruption were now firmly entrenched in the financial, political, agricultural, and cultural systems that supported it.

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