Fearless Futures is a strong believer that history lives out in the present, and we need to look backwards to make sense of the now. So let’s go back in time.

One possible starting point in this history is the arrival of two privateer ships to what is now called Virginia, America in 1619. The ships were owned by Englishman Richard Rich and there were enslaved African people upon them. [1]

It’s important that we acknowledge that concurrent with the English practice of slavery is the genocidal drive against the Native peoples of what is now America who lived and live - and resisted and persisted - on this land for millennia.

While slavery has existed through time all over the world, the establishment of the institution of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery across the Americas and Caribbean, was unique.

This is because it was for the first time race-based slavery; an originator of anti-Black racism; and hereditary.

**ENSLAVING PEOPLE REQUIRES A JUSTIFICATION.**

These were developed through time - consciously and explicitly by White people - with legislative decision after legislative decision.

**ENGLISH AND OTHER WHITE PEOPLE/SETTLERS DECIDED AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR BARBARISM - BECAUSE IT HAD TO BE SO FOR THEIR INTERESTS - THAT BLACK PEOPLE WERE NOT HUMAN.**

But in 1656 Elizabeth Key in Virginia, one of the first Black people to sue for their freedom, argued that as her father was English, and she had been baptised, she should be free. She won her case. [2]

The legislators of Virginia responded to her freedom with a series of laws in subsequent years to prevent the outcome that Elizabeth Key achieved.

The laws ensured someone in indentured servitude would be considered enslaved for life. The prohibition against enslaving Christians was also removed. [3]

In 1662, Virginia passed a law that broke with English common law. The law stated that the condition of the child should serve according to that of the mother, establishing the principle of partus sequitur ventrem from Roman law. [4]

This, according to Ibram X. Kendi in his book Stamped from the Beginning, is the first example of racist sexism, and sexist racism in American legislation. This was a law that gave freedom to White men to rape Black women and profit from it.

Such legislative processes were also seen in another English colony, Barbados, colonised in 1625. The Barbados ‘Slave Codes’ of 1661 were laws to “protect them [slaves] as we do men’s other goods and Chattels”. [5]

In 1704, South Carolina established the very first slave patrol, and other states would follow suit: the origins of what becomes the police.

Mostly poor White people participated in this role. This functioned as another way to align poorer white people’s societal position with white slave owners, despite their oppositional class interests.

It developed further White people’s investment in their identity as free people, simply because they were not Black people.

1662

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SLAVE PATROLS WERE ABOUT PROTECTING WHITE PEOPLE’S ‘PROPERTY’ - AND CATCHING THOSE WHO WERE RESISTING BY RUNNING AWAY.

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT THE FUNCTION OF THE POLICE TODAY?

STAY TUNED FOR THE ANSWER TO THIS VITAL QUESTION IN PART TWO OF POLICE AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM: HOW DID WE GET HERE?


Anti-Black racism in race-based slavery is a starting point and a mutating process to serve white people’s interests. As such, during this time, whiteness was also developing and its meaning deepening.

The History of White People by Nell Irvin Painter and The Invention of the White Race by Theodore Allan are both excellent on how white people came to be White.

This tweet quoting a passage from James Baldwin’s 1985 essay ‘The Price of the Ticket’ speaks to the process of ‘becoming White’. [6]

Perhaps through this lens ‘becoming White’ is usefully understood as extraction?

One thing that often comes up in conversations about oppression is this idea that oppression emerges because some group of people ‘fear’ some other group.

We hear this all the time.

Anti-Black racism did not originate because the English and other White Europeans feared African, Black people. Anti-Black racism was invented to justify the domination over and subjugation of a group of people in service of profit, control and power.

WHITENESS - BY DEMARCATING ITS BOUNDARIES, SPECIFYING WHO WAS WITHIN IT - WAS INVENTED EXPLICITLY TO ACCUMULATE WEALTH, CONTROL AND POWER.

The intellectual contortions needed to speak that anti-Black racism is born of fear - when White people travelled on ships to Africa to steal African people, then legislated against their freedom to create the conditions for centuries of further brutality - is truly absurd.

The hanging of nooses in the US in the wake of the uprisings show the many ways domination - and death - is exercised. Concurrently, 6 Black men have been found hanging from trees over the last month. [7]
It’s essential to remember that ever since slavery as an institution began, Black people have resisted and fought for their freedom. Bussa’s rebellion in 1816 in Barbados is one such example. [8] There are many other uprisings named here. We are sure that there are also those that weren’t documented. And of course resistance also exists in day to day modes that are key to survival. [9]

The freedom that Black people fought for in the Haitian revolution is a major part of world history (1792-1804). Important detail: during the revolution, Britain invaded in 1793 hoping to colonise the island, away from France. [10]

On Jan 1, 1804, Dessalines declared the nation independent + renamed it Haiti, honouring the indigenous Taino-Arawak name for the entire island of ‘Hispaniola’, which they called Ay-ti ‘land of mountains’. [10][11]

The compensation commission distributed £20m to slave owners. That sum represented 40% of the total government expenditure for 1834. It is the modern equivalent of between £16bn and £17bn. [12]

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The connections between 1834 and 2009 are that many British banks bailed out in 2009 also have links to the slave trade through the merchant banks they emerged from. As does the Bank of England. [13][14]

The history of British slave ownership has been buried: now its scale can be revealed by David Olusoga [15][16] The history of British slave ownership has been buried: now its scale can be revealed by David Olusoga.
"From their arrival around 1619, African people had illegally resisted slavery. They had thus been stamped from the beginning as criminals. In all of the fifty suspected or actual slave revolts reported in newspapers during the American colonial era, resisting Africans were nearly always cast as violent criminals, not people reacting to enslavers’ regular brutality, or pressing from the most basic human desire: freedom."

The “sus laws” were so called because they only needed to rely on suspicion alone. In order to suspect means to see someone by default as a criminal. As we have seen, Black people’s freedom - their right to existence - has been constructed as criminal.

Laws also determine what and who is illegal and what and who is legal. The institution of slavery meant enslaving people was legal, but running away for one’s freedom or resisting for one’s freedom was illegal. See this passage from Stamped from the Beginning.

“What does this tell us? That ‘crime’ is ALWAYS socially constructed and politically determined. This is essential to hold on to. Section 4 of The Vagrancy Act of 1824 is the precursor to ‘sus laws’ and Section 60 stop and search. [18]"

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What we see through these historical examples is that: White people have been made worthy of resource, have been made to be deserving, and that this comes at the expense of and extraction from Black people.

Haiti’s reparations to France and the British tax payer and enslaved people themselves to slave owners tells us that reparations for slavery are always possible. Because they have been paid before. Just to the wrong party.

Monday 22nd June is/was Windrush Day. In light of the above, how might we understand the so-called Windrush ‘scandal’ instead as a continuum of the structuring of relations between the UK and those people and lands it colonised? [19]"
Perhaps to maintain White dominance in certain geographies while the empire was being rolled back. This history is detailed in Kathleen Paul’s brilliant book: Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era.

The immigration regime of the UK state is the ‘legal’ enforcer and arbiter of who gets to be human. It too casts some people as criminals for not ‘following the rules’.

But the state is silent on the rules it created to ‘legally’ colonise and enslave people. The laws that interlink the people to Britain that it deports from Britain. [20]

Our analysis must connect the detention centres (governed by Her Majesty’s Prisons) and deportation charter flights as central to the policing of Black people as well as other racialised and colonised communities directed by the state. [21]

We must remember Jimmy Mubenga who was killed by 3 G4S guards on a deportation flight to Angola. The guards were acquitted. [22]

Two of the many ways that anti-Black racism operates, are that at every turn, policy, law and institutions are organised to criminalise Black people and place Black people in closer proximity to death, through extraction and expropriation in service of White people.

White people conversely are presumed innocent, invested in and are made fully human in their whiteness by law, policy and institutions within this system of oppression, whether they acknowledge it or not. Historical processes structure and reproduce these collective arrangements.

THESE THREE INFOGRAPHICS ARE NOT EXHAUSTIVE.

WE HAVE NOT TOUCHED ON THE WAYS THAT ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY, INEVITABLY INTERACT WITH CISSEXISM, DISABLISM AND CLASSISM TO POLICE IN MANIFOLD WAYS THE PERIMETERS OF WHO GETS TO BE HUMAN AND FREE.

As we stated in Part One, this is not a total history. Hopefully, these three infographics just serves as one departure point for your own research.

If you would like to keep up with our cutting-edge inclusion analysis and insightful ideas for inclusive action, why not join our newsletter here?