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# The Trace of Consumerism and Flesh

Consumerism is a cause of slavery. Does the end justify the means? Mass incarceration may be the evolution of cattle slavery but consumerism may no longer be the cause for it. America still consumes but its' appetite has evolved along with the way produce is manufactured. Enslavement/Imprisonment of minorities are no longer agreeable amongst the mass of America. Let's see how the origin and transition of slavery in relation to Consumerism has taken place in America.

According to Harari, During the Slave trade, Slaves were bought and sold on the London Stock Exchange (Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. 2015). Slavery became the answer for the sales of fashioned commodities, such as sugar amongst others. Within America, the consumption of cotton became the burden of product for people with a melanated skin tone. Slaves themselves became status symbols, Daily Alta California, Volume 84, Number 152, 1 June 1891 states, "a black boy about 15 years of age named John Whitter, ran away from Colonel Kirke on the 15th inst. "He has a silver collar about his neck on which is the Colonel's coat of arms and cipher; An advertisement placed in the London Gazette, March, 1685, to retrieve a "pet" slave.

Furthermore, one can argue that slavery was not for the sole purpose of consumerism. Here, Whitter became more than a product of consumerism, he became a (status) symbol of it. In 1807,

London's parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act-condemning the slave trade. America did not pass the Emancipation Proclamation until January 1, 1863, during a civil war, fueled by Confederate states to resume slavery after it was deemed inhuman and obsolete for production in mass. Slavery made the transition of being the cause of consumerism to becoming a coveted effect of it. Can Mass incarceration be stated as the cause of consumerism as well?

Since the Emancipation Proclamation, Slavery has been abolished all but in cultural practice. Freed slaves and coloreds have and are dealing with the evolved labels of slavery, such as vagabond, pauper, and felon, that criminalizes Blacks/Latinx. Vagabonds who were convicted in the South, were sent to prison to produce [hard labor]. Douglas Blackmon states in his 2009 non-fiction Pulitzer Prize book, "Southern states in the decades following the Civil War developed a system of arresting blacks on flimsy charges and then selling them to plantations, lumber camps and mines for hard labor in deplorable circumstances." (Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War Until World War II, 2008). The voices lost inside the Alabama Coal mines can be also heard echoing on consumer lines in McDonalds and Walmart.

Melvin Ray, an Alabama prisoner advocating for the Free Alabama Movement claims McDonald's uses prisoners to process beef for patties and package bread, milk, chicken products(America's Slave Empire, *Truthdig*, 2015). Walmart confirmed to using voluntary prison labor; wages paid to prisoners' however range from $0.23 to $1.15 an hour (Penal Labor in the United States/ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). As Reconstruction Era sharecroppers, felons are being exploited the same. Prison befallen minorities sometimes by police, profiling and

criminalizing their appearance or skin color as their predecessors did towards considered vagabonds. Walmart argues the process of utilizing felons to fulfill the appetite of their consumers.

In their defense, Walmart states, "These voluntary programs pay the inmates prevailing wages and provide positive, private sector job training and marketable skills to help them integrate back into society and gain meaningful employment as they exit the criminal justice system" ( Miriam Valverde, PolitiFact, The Poynter Institute, 2020). Many Americans still buy into the stereotype of all prisoners being harden criminals, in desperate need of rehabilitation as their forefathers bought into the stereotype of Africans/Americans being savages, in desperate need of salvation.

In conclusion, Though Consumerism has an evolved facet of a status symbol, it's means is still the cause of enslavement and/or imprisonment. The plight of the vagabond is shared with today's prisoners who were criminalized by their hair texture. The fumes of the Southern coal mines where freed blacks were forced to work resemble the smoke that emanates from the Mcdonalds stoves. Package burgers share the serial number of the underpaid that produced it. The end still justifies the means.

Work Cited

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