



**TEACHING & TALKING
ABOUT SLAVERY**

Terminology

- ❖ While "race" is not a scientific / biological fact, it makes sense to keep using this abstract concept in anti-racist, decolonial, and postcolonial studies because it is a concept that still provokes discriminating socio-political and economic realities.
- ❖ However, while it is correct to use "race" as an abstract concept to describe the origins of racism, it is no longer appropriate to speak of the "black race" or the "white race" since this would imply a biological / scientific use of the term "race."
- ❖ It is fine to use "African American" if you speak of Black people who are / were citizens of the United States whose ancestors originally forcefully or voluntarily came from the African continent. If you want to speak about Black people in general, you can simply use "Black people" or people of color (POC). The term BIPOC has recently emerged to refer to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, to avoid saying 'white and non-white'.
- ❖ Most academics now "Black" to underline the fraught and discriminating realities that skin color still produces. "White" is no longer capitalized because the capitalized use of this term is too heavily influenced by and associated to "White nationalism" and extreme right-wing movements and the KKK.
- ❖ **It has become customary now to use the term 'enslaved person' rather than 'slave' whenever possible.**
- ❖ **The term 'Negro' can be used in specific historical contexts, as in 'Negro Spiritual'.**
- ❖ **The n-word should avoided by white people altogether. It is a slur that carries enormous emotional baggage. It may be used by African Americans among each other.**

‘The challenge could be people could not see the importance of being taught that’ --

- Why we should teach about slavery?
- Why do we do it here at the English department

TEACHING

Avoid

- mischaracterization
- sanitization
- sentimentalization
- illusion of knowledge saturation

- **Mischaracterization:**

e.g., attend to suffering & agency of enslaved persons; address white support & blind spots; do not homogenize

- **Sanitization:**

e.g., address realities of torture and abuses (like rape); teach pro-slavery texts; history of slave trade, Arab and African implications; investigate philanthropism

- **Sentimentalization:**

e.g., make enslaved persons be merely about feelings & bodies; sentimentalize the family of slave-traders/owners & of enslaved; glorify white abolitionism (whitewashing)

- **Illusion of knowledge saturation:**

e.g., keep researching; always ask which slavery: time and place matter; read original documents: speeches, court cases, letter correspondences, etc.

TEACHING

Do try to:

- Focus on resistance & resilience
 - Including the Underground Railroad
- Use slave narratives and other sources of enslaved people's actual voices
 - Possibly mention or study some spirituals
- Be empathetic & respectful



18th century Britain & US



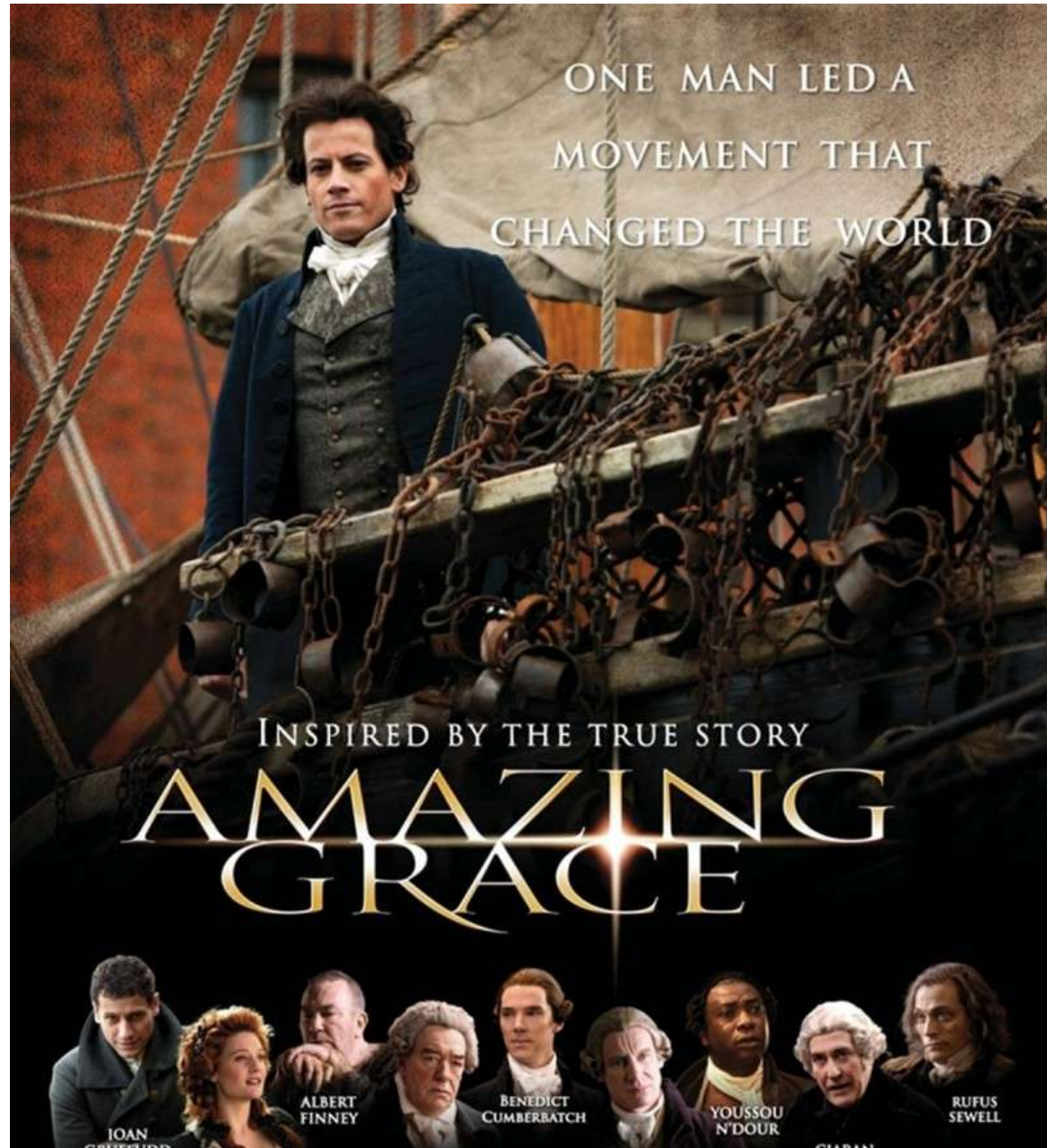
Egypt



Sudan



18th century Britain & US



Olaudah Equiano

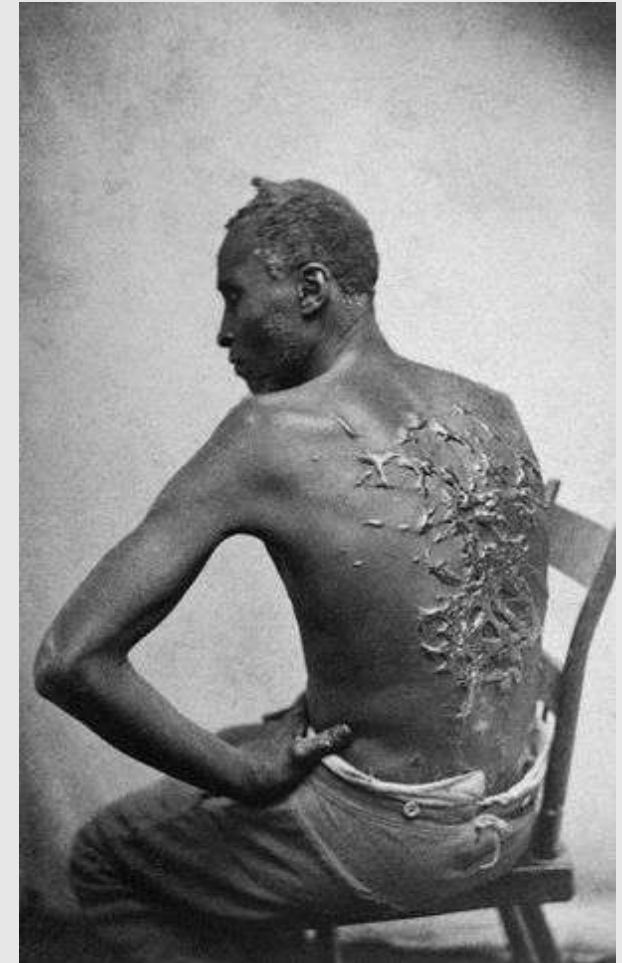
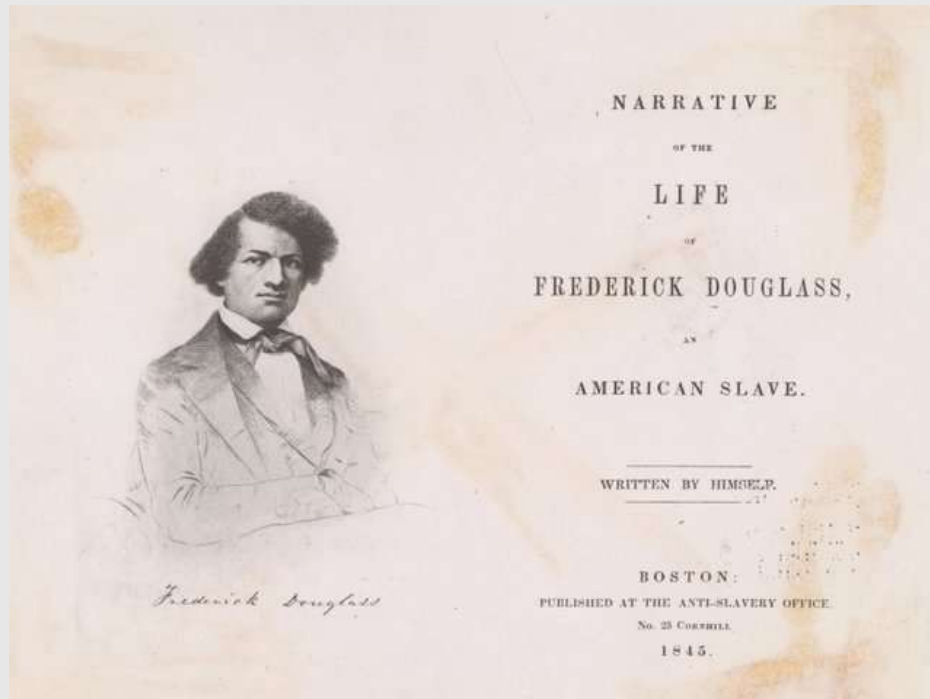
Ignatius Sancho

Ottobah Cugnano

Ukawsaw Gronniosaw

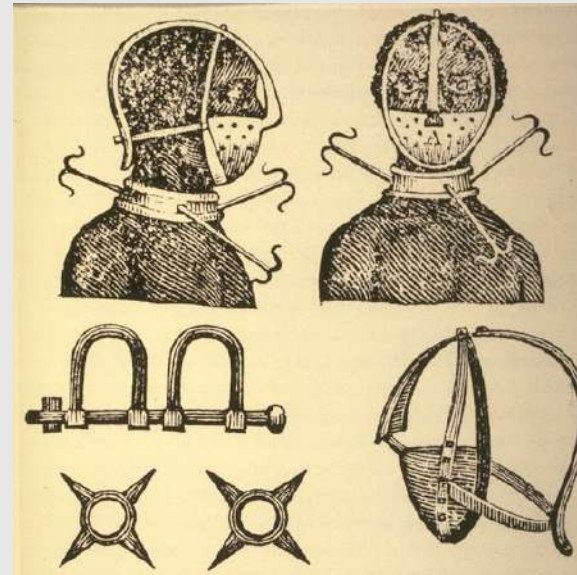
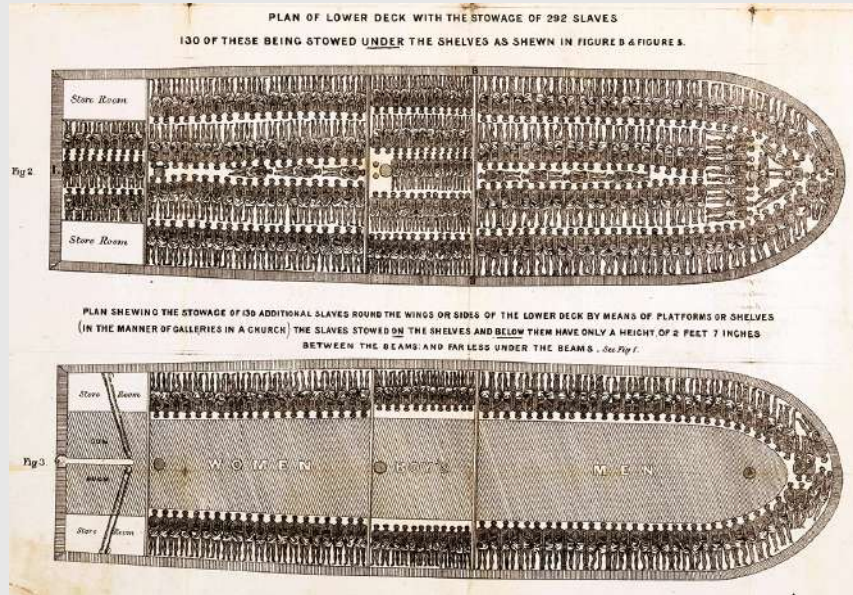
Society "Sons of Africa"

Teaching slavery with images

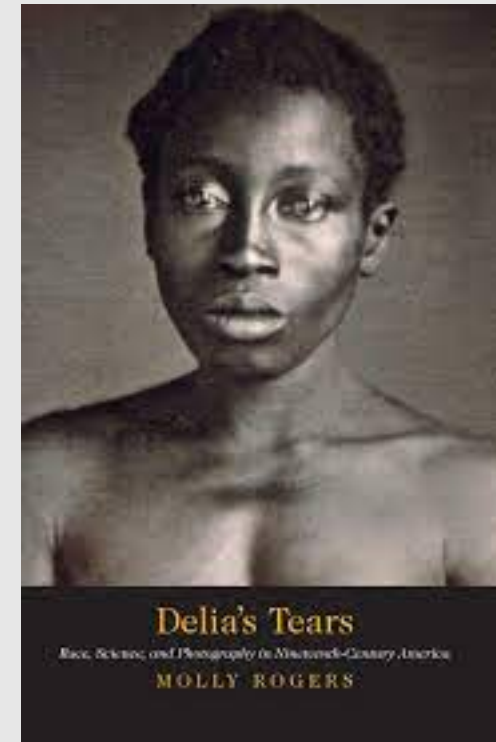


<https://www.history.com/news/whipped-peter-slavery-photo-scoured-back-real-story-civil-war>

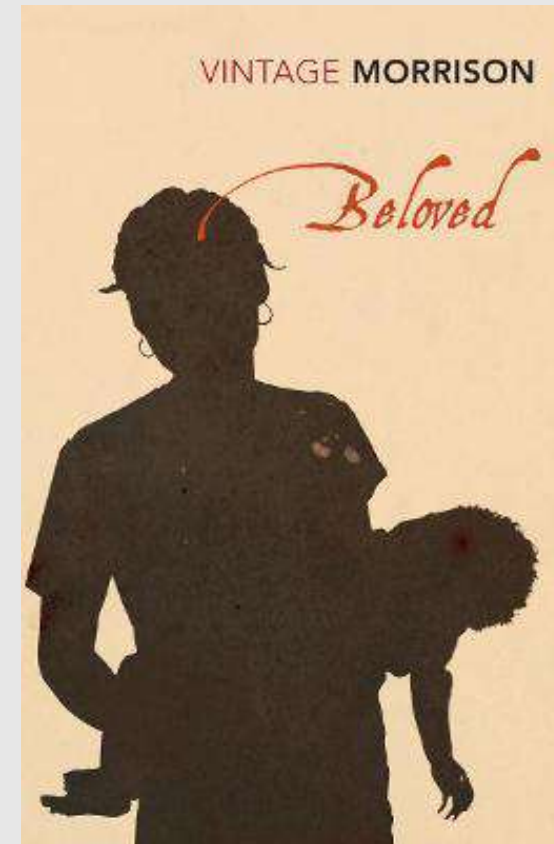
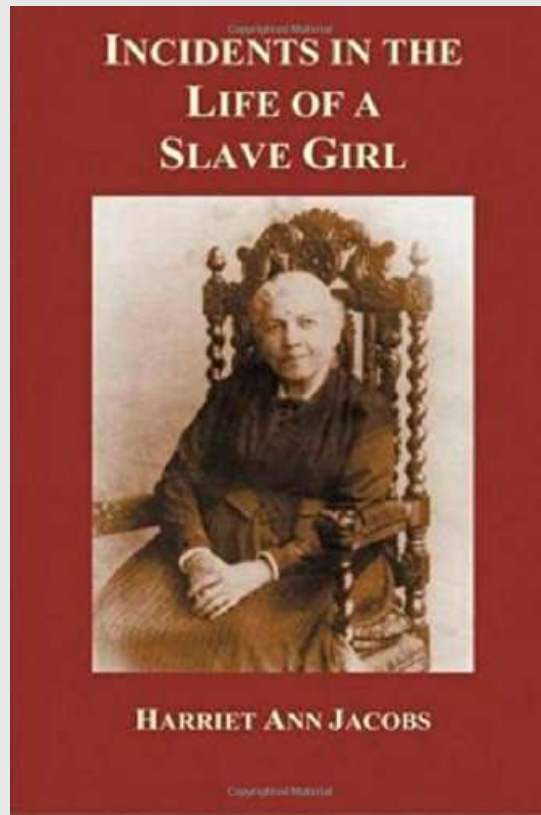
I worry about using these images, but I sometimes use them:



What I would NOT use includes the daguerreotypes commissioned by Louis Agassiz in 1850, at least not in their original format (i.e. full frontal nudity):



Teaching enslaved *women's* experience



QUESTIONS?

- Have you had uncomfortable moments in your courses on slavery? Is being white one of the reasons? Or being Black?
- How have you coped with them? How do I as a teacher cope with them?
- Alternatives to blame and shame?
- How can I create a good research & debate atmosphere in the classroom?
What do students think creates a good research & debate environment?

What is the appropriate way to refer to the black population, specifically in the USA? Is it African American or Black people or something else?

Why is slavery's History not taught in Europe? Overall, why is Africa's history set aside? Before or after slavery?

Has Switzerland ever been held responsible for slavery in the past centuries? If so, in what aspect(s)?

I don't really have any right now on the top of my head, which is probably one of the reasons why I want to come and listen to this talk. I just think that it is important to teach about the issue of racism and slavery in school, and not only from an American literature perspective, but from a historical one as well.

Are the guests people of colour?

During the class on the transatlantic slave trade and others, even when it appeared in a historical text or document, teacher did not say out loud the "N-word" even it was the word clearly written on the document. My question is thus: Why not say the word when historically relevant? is it not important to understand the context in which this word was used? Not saying the word feels like a shallow exercise, in which the property of one's speech is more important than the actual understanding as to why you SHOULDN'T say the word. Thus, we are told not to say it, even in reading historical text DESPITE the fact that it is important to understand the broader context, flaws and all, of a racially prejudiced society. I AM NOT saying that we should use the n-word, just that not reading out loud when present feels particularly silly and hollow. It would be like reading a text on 30s and 40s Germany and refusing to say "Jews" when present in the text. Regarding this, I had classes in Bachelor where the teacher used the N-word only when clearly written and unavoidable when reading a text out loud, with the caveat that, were we to be sensitive, we could say so and he wouldn't say it out loud.

I think teaching slavery must be a challenge but I don't have any specific question related to the topic (yet).

We tend to speak about slavery as if it is something belonging to the past while the consequences of it are very actual.

It seems that when taught about the European history of slavery, white students would be dimmed into a sense of guiltiness or some sense of historical culpability. But how should we ourselves regard, and lead students to reflect upon the relation between modern European civilisation -- if we are not yet so radically leftist as to deny it -- and the system of slavery based on which (at least partially) Europe accumulated considerable wealth and thanks to which Europe took initiative in modernisation along with the colonising undertakings? For instance, should we lead students to reevaluate George Washington as a "bad person" simply because he used to own slaves? In other words, (to what extent) should the attitude towards slavery be a significant indicator now according to which to criticise certain authors and certain historical figures?

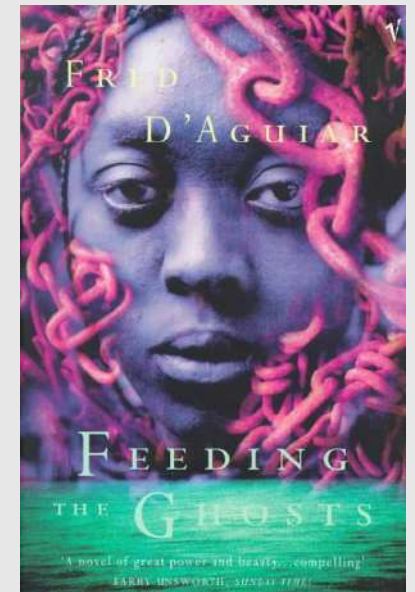
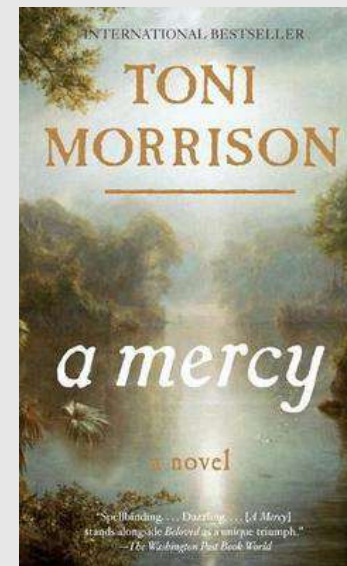
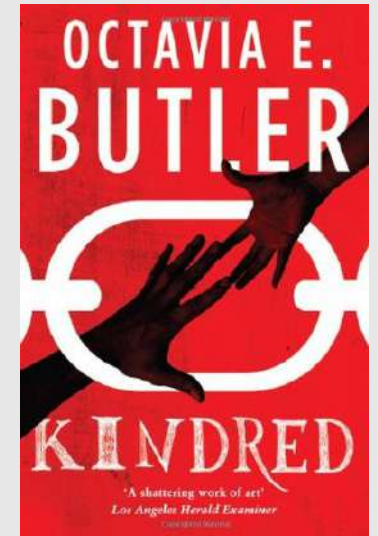
Some say that "difficult" topics such as slavery shouldn't be taught to a younger category of age, what are your thoughts on that? How to make sense of the past then?

How does literature / linguistics contribute to our conception of slavery and what powers are given to literature/linguistics to overcome certain stereotypes? Is there a new literary movement trying to give more place to an accurate depiction of the past and is there a new way to approach this topic in classrooms ?

When we talk about slavery, there is a tendency to focus on the Atlantic slave trade , but it would be interesting to include "modern slavery" in the programmes

Literature and slavery

- Reading slave narratives
 - Douglass, Jacobs, Equiano,
- But also neo-slave narratives
 - Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (1966)
 - William Styron, *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967)
 - Ernest J. Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971)
 - Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (1976)
 - Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)
 - Sherley Anne Williams, *Dessa Rose* (1986)
 - Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987), *A Mercy* (2008)
 - Fred D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997)



The Past in the Present: UK, US & Switzerland



Edward Colston: a slave trader for Royal African Company, merchant and philanthropist, statue in Bristol toppled during Black Lives Matters protests.



A journalistic/historical project to give more place to slavery in the national narrative and in classrooms in US





ALFRED ESCHER (ZH)

ESCHER FAMILY HAD A PLANTATION IN ZURICH, WORKED BY ENSLAVED PERSONS



DAVID DE PURY (NE)

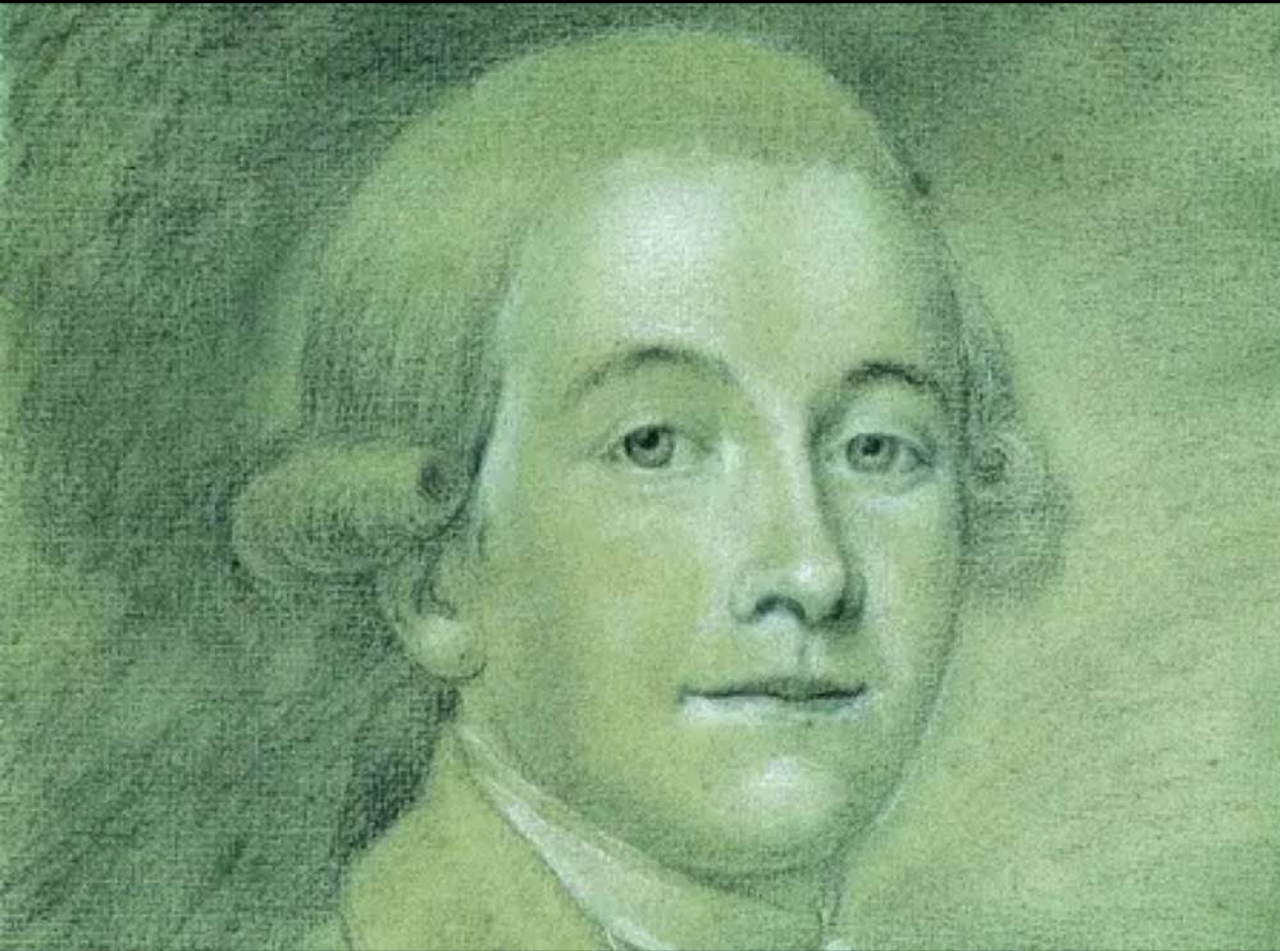
EARNED A FORTUNE AS SHAREHOLDER OF SOCIETIES THAT
INVESTED IN SLAVE TRANSPORTATIONS



Swiss Isaac Miville
from Basel led in 1652
the Swedish Slave Fort
«Cape Coast» in today
Ghana,



**1815 -1914: 7600 Swiss mercenaries fought in the Dutch Colonial Army;
here in the war of Sumatra.**



Christoph Burckhardt participated in 21 slave-trade expeditions 1783-1818. More than 7'000 enslaved people transported to the Americas.



GUILD 'ZUM MOHREN' (BERN),
AFRICAN FIGURE COVERED

Other involvements

- Berne was at one point the largest shareholder of the British slave trading firm the South Sea Company
- Zurich also had shares in the company
- Swiss banks owned as much as a third of the Compagnie des Indes, a French company that held a monopoly over the West African slave trade
- The Swiss textile industry was closely tied to the triangular trade, with *indiennes* being sold in Africa to raise money for buying enslaved people
- Swiss were soldiers on slave boats and in slavery-enforcing armies in US, Haiti and Surinam
- Swiss owned plantations in the US South as well as in Brazil until 1880s
- One of Basel's major firms purchased a ship designed for the slave trade. The venture ended in disaster, resulting in the death of two-thirds of its human cargo.
- 20 Swiss firms organized over 100 slaving expeditions
- In 2005, researchers from the University of Lausanne concluded that Swiss citizens were involved in 1.5% of financing the transfer of some 11 million slaves to the New World.

Louis Agassiz (1807-1873)

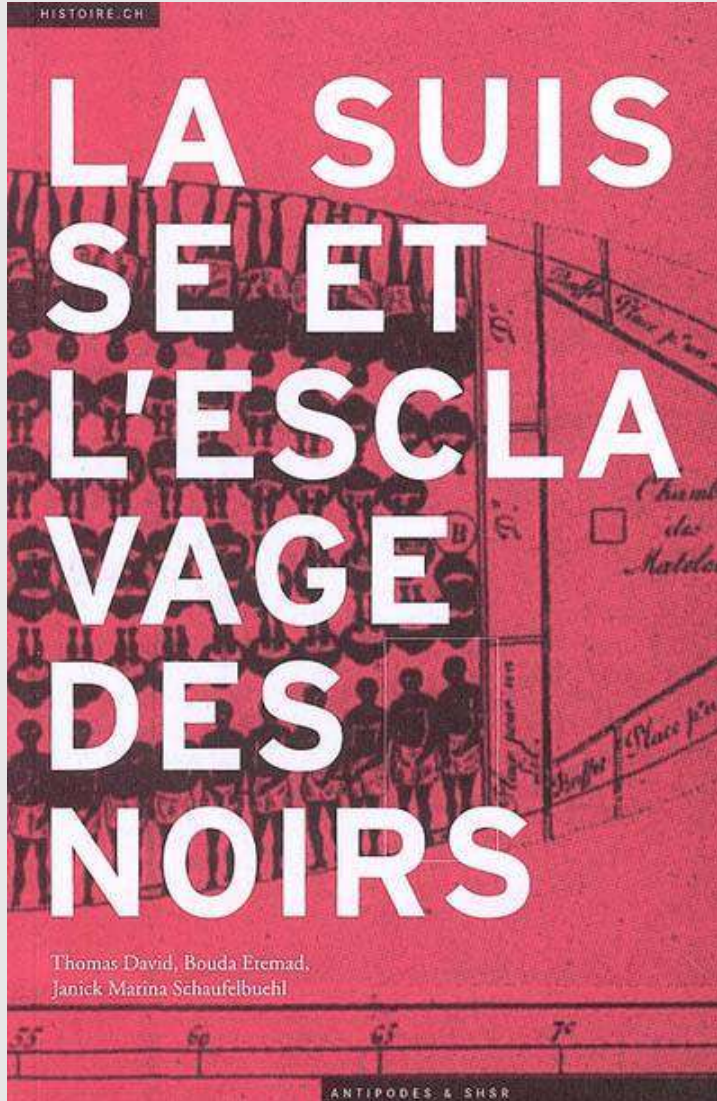
- Born in Môtier in FR, studied in Bienne, Lausanne, Zurich, Heidelberg and Munich; was professor at Neuchâtel and later at Harvard, in USA, for many years
- Became influential advocate of scientific racism
- And specifically polygenesis – meaning that Africans came a different origin than white people, basically saying they were a different species
- “the brain of the Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a seven months’ infant in the womb of a White.”
- Commissioned the 1850 images known as Zealy daguerreotypes to prove that African-born slaves were anatomically and biologically different from whites



SCORES (Swiss Committee on Slavery Reparations)

Statement:

Slavery, a crime against humanity which lasted for centuries within the European exploitation of their colonies in the Americas, requires acknowledgement and spiritual as well as material reparation. This also applies to the case of Switzerland, which, as a social, economic, ideological and cultural space, was involved in that system and profited from it from the 16th to the 19th century. Reparations must be the negotiated result of a dialogue between the descendants of those who profited from that system and the descendants of the victims.



I have followed a seminar on African American literature during my BA at unine, and the teacher did note how ironic it was that he, a white man was teaching a class of mainly white students about this. While I think he did so with respect and sensitivity, I think having more teachers that are POC would help for this.

I wonder if again, as a female, caucasian, not having close ties with the subject, I might be viewed as not legitimate to write academically (and later teach) on such a subject.

I wonder if there is a debate about who is or isn't legitimate to teach literature about slavery? Or if it is a question that one should ask himself/herself before teaching it?

I believe it is crucial - when speaking of slavery - to situate ourselves. Who am I to speak about this subject ? As an european ? As a white woman ? Especially regarding the audience we are faced to. Our language, the things we are about to say need to be meticulously and delicately thought.

I believe it is important to begin any lectures by telling students how Switzerland was implicated in the slave trade (with for example the case of Pourtalès in Neuchatel or even Henry Dunant) and to show students how some families in Switzerland have benefited from the slave trade - buildings, statues, etc..- that are still nowadays present in our lives.

explaining that Switzerland is and has been part of the problem, people seem to feel rather disconnected from the subject when brought up

QUESTIONS?