

JOURNAL

DE I.A

SOCIÉTÉ DES AMÉRICANISTES

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DE I.A

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BEYOND POVERTY : THE NEGRO AND THE MULATTO IN BRAZIL *

BY FLORESTAN FERNANDES

1. Introduction :

The most impressive aspect of the racial situation in Brazil appears under the trenchant denial of the existence of any "color" or "racial" problem. Racial prejudice and discrimination, as racial segregation, are seen as a sort of sin and as dishonorable behavior. Thus, we have two different levels of reality perception and of action connected with "color" and "race": first, overt, in which racial equality and racial democracy are supposed and proclaimed; second, covert, in which collateral functions perform through, below and beyond the social stratification.

This overlay is not exclusive to race relations. It appears in other levels of social life. In the case of race relations it emerges as a clear product from the prevailing racial ideology and racial utopia, both built during slavery by the white-dominant stratum -- the rural and urban masters. Slavery was not in conflict with the Portuguese law and cultural tradition. The Roman law offered to the crown ordinances the elements with which it would be possible to classify the "Indians" or the "Africans" as *things*, as movable property, and establish the social transmission of social position through the mother (according to the principle *partus sequitur ventrem*), deny to the slave any human condition (*servus personam non habet*, etc...) On

* This paper was first presented, in a condensed version, at the seminars on *Minorities in Latin America and the United States*, (The College of the Finger Lakes, Corning, New York, December 5, 1969).

the other hand, slavery was practiced on a small scale in Lisbon, and was attempted in Açores, Madeira, Cabo Verde and São Tomé, pioneering the modern plantation system. But slavery was in conflict with religion and the mores created by the Catholic conception of the world. This conflict, of a moral nature, did not give to the slave, in general, a better condition and more human treatment, as Frank Tannebaum believed. It only brought about a tendency to disguise things, separating the permissive from the real being.

Nevertheless, Brazil has a good intellectual tradition of penetrating, realistic, and unmasking objective knowledge of the racial situation. First of all, the conservative pride had given rise to very clear distinctions (as usually happened with the masters and some aristocratic white families arrogantly self-affirmative on matters of racial inequality and race differences). Second, some outstanding figures, leaders of the ideals of national emancipation or of abolitionism, as José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, Luiz Gama, Perdigão Malheiros, Joaquim Nabuco, Antonio Bento, etc., tried to point out the nature of the white behavior and value-orientations, connected with the Negroes and the Mulattos. Third, the "negro movements" after the First World War (especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro during the 20's, 30's and 40's), as well as intellectual Negro conferences on race relations, have contributed to a new realistic perception and explanation of the complex Brazilian racial situation.

The findings of modern sociological, anthropological, or psychological investigations (Samuel Lowrie; Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes; L. A. Costa Pinto; Orey Megueira; A. Guerreiro Ramos; Octavio Ianni, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Renato Jardim Moreira; Thales de Azevedo; Charles Wagley, Marvin Harris, Henry W. Hutchinson and Ben Zimmernan; René Ribeiro; João Baptista Borges Pereira; Virginia Leone Bicudo; Aníela Ginsberg; Carolina Maruscelli Bori; Dante Moreira Leite; etc.), have confirmed and deepened the evidence discovered by earlier writers. In the present discussion, I will limit myself to three special topics: the roots of competitive social order in Brazil; some objective evidences of racial inequality and its sociological meaning; the Brazilian pattern of racial prejudice and discrimination¹.

2. The Roots of Competitive Social Order in Brazil:

As occurred in all modern countries in which slavery was connected with colonial exploitation and the plantation system, the Brazilian society faced great difficulties in spreading and integrating the competitive social order.

1. Cf. *L'Esclavage au Brésil*. Paris, Librairie de Guillaumin et Cie, 1881; *Le Brésil en 1884*, Faro & Lamo, Editeurs, Rio de Janeiro, 1884.

Literally speaking, this social order emerged with the rupture of the old colonial system, but its evolution was more an urban phenomenon, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Slavery and the relative importance of the freedmen as a source of an earning social category were a great obstacle to the differentiation and universalization of the competitive social order. The reason is very well known. As Louis Couty pointed out, the devaluation and the degradation of work produced by slavery impeded or obstructed the constitution of a wage-earning class in urban as in rural areas and the emergence of a small farmer sector. Because of this, until the middle of the nineteenth century the market economy didn't give rise to a typical modern organisation, in a capitalistic sense, of work and of economic relations. Only in a few cities competition performed some basic constructive functions and could integrate the roles or the positions of some social agents (the landlords or planters, as suppliers of tropical products; the agents of export-import business; native and foreign merchants and traders; some bankers of financial agents; the professionals, teachers and bureaucrats; the few manufacturers and factory workers; the technicians, artisans and skilled workers, etc.).

With the interruption of the slave traffic and the emancipationist laws this sector began to enlarge and to grow. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the crisis of the slavery system — which attained a structural and irreversible trend at the decade of sixty — reached its climax. Then the modernization of the urban sector became a strong and autonomous social force, operating simultaneously through the economic and political levels. This was an historical point of inflexion, in which the disintegration of the master-slave social order and the integration of the competitive social order appeared as concomitant social phenomena².

In this large context, the situation of the Negroes and the Mulattos was affected in three different directions. Until this period, as slaves or as freedmen, they have had a strong and untouchable position in the structure of economy. As soon as the entire structure of the system of production began to change, this position was menaced on two fronts. The internal market supplied the country with immigrants who came from Europe and looked for the richer and developing areas, to work as wage-earning class, rural and urban, or as traders, merchants, shopkeepers or manufacturers. On the other side, white traditional families started to move from

2. As a large frame of reference: F. FERNANDES, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes*, São Paulo, Dominus Editora — Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1965, vol. I, cap. 1; R. BASTIDE e F. FERNANDES, *Brancos e Negros em São Paulo*, São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional, 2ª edição, 1959, caps. I-II; O. LASSI, "O Progresso Econômico e o Trabalhador Livre", in S. Buarque de Hollanda, *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira: O Brasil monárquico*, Vol. III, São Paulo, 1964, Difusão Europeia do Livro, pp. 297-319; C. PADOA JUNIOR, *História Econômica do Brasil*, São Paulo, Editora Brasiliense, 2ª ed., 1949, cap. 19.

the interior to the great cities, and the poor or dependent people³ arose as a growing wage-earning sector. In the North and Northeast, the relative economic stagnation of plantation economy stimulated two correlative processes — the sale of the surplus slave labor to the coffee plantations of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais; and the consolidation of the positions of the Negro or Mulatto freedmen as agents of free labor (unskilled or skilled, especially in the growing urban economy). In the rapidly developing regions of coffee plantations (but in particular in São Paulo), the newcomers, foreigners or nationals, absorbed the best economic opportunities, even in the rural areas, accelerating the crisis of slavery and converting the Negroes and Mulattos, predominantly, into a marginal sector of the population and into a subproletariat. In the areas of the South, in which the foreign colonization was combined with small farmers or those in which the cattle ranch predominated, controlled by powerful traditional families, the Negroes and the Mulattos were also out of competition for the new opportunities, monopolized by the Europeans, or remained in disguised dependent or marginal positions⁴.

Thus, as a general conclusion: the victim of slavery was also victimized by the crisis of the slave system of production. The social revolution of the competitive social order started and finished as a *white revolution*. Because of this, white supremacy was never menaced by abolitionism. On the contrary, it was only reorganized in other terms, in which competition had a terrible consequence — the exclusion, partially or totally, of the ex-agent of slave labor and of the freedmen from the vital flux of economic growth and social development.

At the zero point of their inclusion in a new social order, therefore, the Negro and the Mulatto had several choices, all spoliatory and deplorable. First, the return to the regions of their origins (or of their ascendants), that is, to some rural area of the North-east or a stagnant and backward community of the interior of São Paulo, Minas Gerais or Rio de Janeiro. This solution implied a submersion into a natural economy of subsistence. Second, the permanence as a rural laborer, in general changing from the old master to a new employer. This solution, as the ex-slave didn't have the institutions

3. In general, a racial mixed sector of population, in the South phenotypically and socially "white". The process occurred simultaneously in the cities and in the rural areas.

4. With reference to the Northeast and the emergence of a free labor market, the considerations are based on an unpublished study of Barbara Troso, on the freedman in Bahia. With reference to São Paulo, Rio grande do Sul, Paraná e Santa Catarina: cf. R. BASTIDE, e F. FERNANDES, *Brancos e Negros em São Paulo*, loc. cit., F. FERNANDES, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes*, loc. cit.; F. HENRIQUE CARDOSO, *Capitalismo e Escravidão no Brasil Meridional*, São Paulo, Difusão Europeia do Livro, 1962; O. LANNI, *As Melaniorraças do Escravos*, São Paulo, Difusão Europeia do Livro, 1962; O. LANNI, *Raças e Classes no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1966; F. Henrique Cardoso e O. LANNI, *Côr e Mobilidade Social em Florianópolis*, São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional.

and the cultural traditions of the immigrants, and had, on the other hand, to compete with them in terms of low payment⁵, implied a permanent incapacity to use domestic cooperation, the resultant techniques of thrift and social mobility as a mechanism of accumulation of capital and of competition. Third, the concentration in a big city, like São Paulo, and the conglomeration in the slums. This solution implied permanent or temporary unemployment for the man, parasitism and over-burdening for the woman and general anomie for all. Life in the city rarely was equivalent of sharing the opportunities of the city. Three succeeding generations have known what social disorganization could mean as a style of life. Fourth, the flight to little cities, in which the semi-skilled, skilled or artisan could protect himself from the competition with the whites, foreigners or nationals, and start a new life. This solution implied a voluntary acceptance of disadvantageous positions with no hopes in regard to the future. It had the same meaning that the absorption of freedmen, in the North-east, acquired during the period of disintegration of slavery. The destiny of the agents, then, was a function of the stagnation or progress of the selected community, a matter of blind chance.

From this perspective, it is clear that the problems of the Brazilian Negroes or Mulattos is, above all, a problem created by the incapacity of the national society to develop rapidly a growing capitalistic economy, able to absorb the ex-slaves and the freedmen in the labor market. Because of this, they were expelled to the periphery of the competitive social order or to semi-colonial and colonial structures inherited from the past. These semi-colonial or colonial structures performed important functions in the maintenance of the rural economy, especially where the plantations, cattle ranches or the villages were (or are) dependent on semi-capitalistic forms of work⁶.

(One could argue that, in this aspect, the ex-slaves and the freedmen underwent the destiny common to all "poor people" in Brazil. The destitution of the slaves and the elimination of the freedmen by the effects of competition with the free European immigrants would explain sociologically that process. Nevertheless, as Caio Prado Jr. has pointed out⁷, slavery didn't prepare its human agent to become a free worker, even as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers. Behind the social structure of the master-slave social order, the "slave" and the "Negro" were two parallel elements. When the "slave" was eliminated by social change, the "Negro" became a racial residuum. He lost the social condition which he acquired under slavery and was expelled, as "Negro", downward to the bottom of the "poor people," at the exact moment in which some of its sectors were sharing the

5. On the low wages of the rural free labor, see F. VIOTTIDA DA COSTA, *Da Senzala à Colônia*, São Paulo, Difusão Europeia do Livro, 1966.

6. See bibliography in note 4.

7. C. Prado Junior, *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo Colônia*, São Paulo, Livraria Martins Editora, 1942, pp. 341-342.

opportunities opened by free work and the constitution of a wage-earning class. Thus, the Negro was victimized by his position and by his racial condition. He started, by his own means, the process by which he could be metamorphosed from "Negro" to a new social being.⁸ But, when he was trying to impose upon himself and upon the indifferent whites the "Second Abolition", the attempt was refused and condemned, as a manifestation of "racism".⁹ In other words, he was denied a self-affirmation as "Negro" in spite of his social marginality as such.

3. Evidence of Racial Inequality and its Sociological Meaning :

If the description given above is correct, the changes in social structure that have occurred in Brazilian society from the abolition of slavery until now, have had no profound effects (or very slight effects) on the racial concentration of wealth, social prestige and power. The lack of objective indicators do not permit a complete verification of this conclusion. The last census (in 1960) has excluded the racial aspects of the Brazilian population. Nevertheless, the census of 1950 offered some useful information.

As is well known, the percentage of the different racial stocks (or color categories) varies in each physiographic region of the country (cf. Table I). In consequence, the degree of concentration of each racial stock (or color category) in the different regions varies with clear intensity (cf. Table II). Nevertheless, the two basic indicators — occupational position and level of schooling — which we could use through the census data, reveal a basic trend of monopoly of the best opportunities by the whites. We have selected the position of employer and the completed educational levels in some representative states and in the country as the best indicator accessible. They involve roles, values and cultural traditions expressive in terms of white evaluations of prestige, control of power and upward social mobility.

The basic sociological evidence of the data is not negative, considering that slavery was ended only sixty-two years ago (with reference to the census of 1950), the total negligence of the human problems of the "poor people" in general and of the destitute population of slave origin, the lack of value orientations and of experience with the economic, social and cultural requisites of the developing competitive social order predominant among negroes and mulattos, the indifference or disguised opposition of whites to a democratic sharing of economic or educational opportunities with both

sectors of Brazilian population, etc., the census data shows an improvement of the situation by the effort of these color groups to take the possible advantages of freedom and progress. Most of the issues, naturally, are connected with the gradual acquisition of new value orientations and cultural traditions, the importance of negroes and mulattos as economic agents (as labor force or as predominantly small entrepreneurs), and the discovery and use of educational opportunities as a ladder to social integration and upward mobility. The importance of these aspects is greater than could be realized at first glance, because of the cumulative effects of the economic, social or cultural process involved in the future of new generations.

Nevertheless, the progress has been too moderate and deceptive. In reality, the Negroes and the Mulattos were projected into the strata of the poorest people, which doesn't share (or shares very little) the trends of economic development and sociocultural change. Even in the regions in which the Negroes and the Mulattos constitute the majority of the population, as in the Northeast and in the East (in which they constitute, conjointly, 53.7 % and 47.3 % respectively, of the region ; and in which they are more concentrated — 72.8 % in the Northeast and 95.5 % in the East, by color group) they have an extremely poor participation in the position of employers and in the best educational opportunities. In terms of the states selected, the range of inequality relating to the employers' positions gives to whites a striking supremacy (they share these positions in a proportion of 3, 4, 5 and even 6 or 8 times to one of the Negroes.) The same occurs in relation to the Mulattos, instead of their being in a better situation than the Negroes (the whites share the employers' positions, on the average, in a proportion which oscillates between 2, 3 or 4 times more than the Mulattos, excepting the case of Rio de Janeiro). The same trends are reproduced in the sharing of educational opportunities, especially at the levels of the secondary schools and the universities, in some states, in a shocking manner. (See Tables III and IV). The comparison of the data furnished by these tables with that of Table V shows that the exclusion of the Negroes and the Mulattos from the best economic and educational opportunities follows the same general pattern, in the eight selected states. The predominance of Mulattos, considered alone, or of Negroes and Mulattos, considered together, makes only a slight difference even in the more "mixed" and more racially "democratic" states.

The meaning of this data is evident. The racial structure of Brazilian society, until now, favors the monopoly of wealth, prestige and power by the whites. The white supremacy is a reality in the present, almost in the same way it was in the past. The organization of society impels the Negro and the Mulatto to poverty, unemployment or underemployment, and to the "Negro's job".

8. Cf. O. LINS, *As Metamorfoses do Escravo*, op. cit. ; F. FERNANDES, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes*, op. cit., vol. I, e vol. II, cap. 5.

9. Cf. R. BASTIDE e F. FERNANDES, *Brancos e Negros em São Paulo*, op. cit., cap. 4. F. FERNANDES, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes*, op. cit., vol. II, cap. 4.

4. The Brazilian Pattern of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination :

Only now are Brazilian social scientists trying to discover the real explanation of this deplorable situation. As Costa Pinto has pointed out, the basic explicative factor is inherent in the persistence of some deep-rooted attitudes and racial orientations of the whites, to treat the Negroes and the Mulattos as subalterns (then to subalternize them). These attitudes and racial orientations are predominant among the upper and middle white classes ; but they appear also in the lower classes and even in the rural areas, especially in the South.

For many Brazilians, these attitudes and racial orientations are products of "external influence", a negative contribution of immigrants and of the modern mass media of communication. They were and are considered an "imported cancer" ¹⁰ to be extirpated by law and formal control. However, the various researches made by Oracy Nogueira ; Roger Bastide and F. Fernandes ; L. A. Costa Pinto ; Octavio Ianni, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Renato Jardim Moreira have shown that the described attitudes and racial orientations are an inherited cultural pattern, widespread in Brazilian society as much as slavery was in the past.

Thus, at the core of the Brazilian racial problem is the persistence of an asymmetrical pattern of race relations, built to regulate the contact and the social ordination between "master", "slave" and "freedman". As happened in the South of the United States, this type of asymmetrical race relation involves a sort of ritualization of racial behavior ¹¹. The master's domination and the slave's or freedman's subordination are part of the same ritual, by which emotions and feelings could be put under control and masked. In Brazil, this type of ritualization had the same functions, reinforced by Catholic pressure to preserve, in some apparent sense, the Christian way of life of masters, slaves and freedmen.

Racial prejudice was inherent in the asymmetrical pattern of race relations, because it was a necessary element in basing the slave-master, or freedman-white relations in the "natural inferiority" of the Negroes and in the efficient performance of slavery and subjugation of the slaves and freedmen. At the same time, the discrimination was inherent in the slave-master social order, in which the proper manner of behavior, the clothing, the language, the occupations, obligations and rights of the slave and the freedman were rigidly prescribed ¹². The persistence of the two elements

10. See especially R. BASTIDE e F. FERNANDES, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, op. cit., cap. V.

11. Cf. R. WILBUR DOYER, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South*. A Study in Social Control, Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1937 (and especially the preface of Robert E. Park, pp. xi-xxiv).

12. Cf. especially R. BASTIDE e F. FERNANDES, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, op. cit., cap. 2.

after the disintegration of slavery is explained by the fact that the class system had not destroyed all structures of the *ancien régime*, especially the structures of race relations ¹³.

It is necessary, nevertheless, to take into account that this result is not only part of a process of cultural lag. Under dependent capitalism, the class system is unable to perform all the destructive or constructive functions it has had in the developed capitalistic countries ¹⁴. Two processes run together — the modernization of the archaic, and the archaization of the modern, as a normal factor of structural integration and of evolution of the society. In reality, as soon as the Negro and the Mulatto were put predominantly outside of economic, social and political reconstruction, they became a marginal partner.

The crisis of the asymmetrical pattern of race relation started even before the Abolition. However, as the Negro and the Mulatto had lost their importance as historical social agent, they suffered the static effect of their new social position. Only now, thanks to internal migrations, the economic progress produced by national integration of society, and the weak upward social mobility, they acquired conditions to cope with white supremacy, predominantly in a disguised and accommodative way.

In spite of some active resistance of Whites, not to these phenomena, but to some outstanding upward-mobile Negro and Mulatto personalities, this long period of starvation contributed to maintain the ritualistic freezing of racial relations. The Negro and the Mulatto, as individuals, but especially as a color minority, are not free to use aggressive competition against Whites, and to explore social conflict to fight against racial inequality. In this context, it is very clear that the price of race tolerance and race accommodation is paid for by the Negro and the Mulatto.

For these reasons, color is not an important element in racial perception and racial consciousness of the world by the White. He has never been menaced, up until now, by the disintegration of slavery and by competition or conflict with Negroes and Mulattos. The White only perceives and is conscious of the Negro or of the Mulatto when he faces a concrete, unexpected situation ¹⁵, or when his attention is directed to questions related to the "color problem."

For the same reasons, the "Brazilian racial dilemma" is also complicated. Not so much because the Whites, Negroes and Mulattos play the expected roles of disguising or denying the "color prejudice" and "color discrimination."

13. See especially F. FERNANDES, *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes*, op. cit., vol. II, cap. 6.

14. Cf. especially F. FERNANDES, *Sociedade de Classes e Subdesenvolvimento*, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar Editores, 1968, cap. 1.

15. Because of this, some techniques, applied by North American psychologists, social psychologists, anthropologists or sociologists in the personal study of perception of race, race differences or race identifications are inefficient in the study of the Brazilian situation.

nation", but because the only way open to the change of the racial situation depends on gradual, very slow, and irregular prosperity of Negroes and Mulattos. Under this aspect, it is out of the question that prejudice and discrimination, in the forms that they assume in Brazil, contribute more to maintain the asymmetric pattern of race relations, than to eliminate it.

This means that, sociologically considered, color prejudice and discrimination are a structural and dynamic source of the "perpetuation of the past in the present". The Whites do not victimize the Negroes and the Mulattos consciously and willfully. The normal and indirect effects of the functions of color prejudice and discrimination do that, without racial tensions and social unrest. Because they restrict the economic, educational, social and political opportunities of the Negro and the Mulatto, maintaining them "out of the system" or at the margin and on the periphery of the competitive social order, color prejudice and discrimination impedes the existence and the emergence of a racial democracy in Brazil.

5. Conclusions :

This general discussion was oriented by some basic assumptions. Considered sociologically, the *structural element of the Brazilian racial situation* has two distinctive dimensions. One, which is specifically social. It is connected with the impossibility, faced by underdeveloped capitalistic and class societies of Latin America, of creating a competitive social order able to absorb the different sectors of population, even partially, in the occupational and social strata of the system of production. The other, which is, by its nature, the "color problem", a complex heritage of the past, continuously reinforced by the trends assumed by inequality under dependent capitalism, and preserved through the conjoint manifestation of prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behavior on the basis of "color."

These two elements work together, in such a manner that they produce cumulative effects dynamically adverse to the change of the racial structure of society, inherited from the past. The social order is changing and, with it, the patterns of race relations. Nevertheless, the relative position of color groups tend to be stable or to change very slightly.

It is beyond question that the most important factor, on the average, is the structure of a class society under dependent capitalism. The static effect of the extreme concentration of wealth, power and social prestige impedes or restricts severely even the upward social mobility and integration to the competitive social order of white racial stocks. The figures given by numbers and proportions of Whites who attained employers' positions (or who monopolize the best educational opportunities) are striking. A comparison with the Japanese suggests that, among the Whites, there prevails a definite trend to maintain and perhaps strengthen either economic and political privileges or social inequities, at the expense of all color and poor groups, including the "white poor people".

However, the static effects are clearly stronger when we consider the Negroes and the Mulattos. Instead of the relative advantages of the Mulattos with regard to the Negroes, they also share the economic, social, and political inequities of Brazilian society in a very hard way (if we compare the percentages on color composition and concentration of population with the distribution of employers' positions and the best educational opportunities). Some could argue that "passing" — so easily, especially in the regions in which the Mulattos constitute the majority or a large part of the population — would explain these adverse figures. But in reality, this argument has no sociological meaning. Each color group, sociologically understood, embraces people who consider themselves and who are accepted under a given color category. On the other side, our research with Bastide has shown that the overlapping or crossing, in terms of color lines, is more complicated than had been presumed. As some "light" Mulattos try to "pass for white", others refuse to do that and even prefer to classify themselves as "Negroes." This was a surprising result. Indeed, what counts, suggests a dramatic situation which cannot be denied or hidden.

The economic, social and cultural condition of the Negroes is the most terrible aspect of the entire picture, given by the census data. At the 1950 census, the Negroes comprised almost 14 million (11 % of the total population), but they shared less than 20,000 opportunities as employers (0.9 %); predominantly at modest levels, and only 6,794 (0.6 %) and 448 (0.2 %) had completed, respectively, courses in secondary schools and universities. A situation like that involves more than social inequality and insidious poverty. It presupposes that the individuals affected are not included, as a racial stock, in the existing social order, as if they were not human beings or normal citizens.

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