

# Ayatollah Khamenei Outraged at American “Racism”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**It was inevitable** that the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would denounce America for its “racism” – meaning, as far as he was concerned, the entire country should be held responsible for the actions of four policemen, one of whom (according to the autopsy, accidentally) asphyxiated a black man they were attempting to subdue.

The story of Khamenei’s exaggerated and highly selective outrage is at the [Jerusalem Post](#):

*Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei responded to the US race protests, tweeting that “if you’re dark-skinned walking in the US, you can’t be sure you’ll be alive in the*

*next few minutes.”*

*In a tweet appealing to the American Left, Khamenei spoke about the US economic issues and the killing of 46-year-old George Floyd who was choked to death by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

*“Slavery, said Khamenei, “is one of the tragic events in history. They used to sail ships from the Atlantic Ocean and anchor on the coast of West African countries, such as Gambia and other countries on the continent.”*

The Ayatollah seems only to know about the transatlantic slave trade, from Africa to the Americas. He completely ignores the slave trade conducted by Muslim Arabs in East and Central Africa. This slave trade consisted of Arab slavers seizing blacks in the bush and bringing them by slave coffle and then dhow to the Islamic slave markets in Jiddah, Muscat, Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and other cities. This Islamic Slave Trade began long before, and ended long after, and claimed many more victims, than the Atlantic Slave Trade that the Supreme Leader focuses on exclusively.

Slavery is part of Islam. Muhammad himself bought, sold, and owned slaves. Since Muhammad was the Perfect Man, and the Model of Conduct, it was impossible to denounce a practice that he clearly engaged in himself. Thus there were no Arab abolitionists, no Muslim William Wilberforces. It was Western pressure that ended Arab slavery. It was the Royal Navy that, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century patrolled the coasts of Arabia and intercepted dhows carrying slaves. Slavery continued to exist, however, in several Muslim Arab countries in the Middle East until well into the 20th century. And in several African states, even now hundreds of thousands of black slaves have Arab masters.

It was only in 1962 that slavery was officially abolished in Saudi Arabia and Yemen – and only under terrific Western

pressure. Just before abolition, there were half a million black slaves in Saudi Arabia. Despite that abolition, there are still black Africans held in "slave-like conditions," even if slavery no longer exists officially, in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and some of the sheikdoms of the Gulf. In the Sudan, northern Arabs continued to enslave southern blacks, especially during the Second Sudanese Civil War, until that war ended in 2005, when as many as 200,000 black Africans were finally released from slavery. Arabs continue to this day to keep 600,000 black slaves in Mauritania, 200,000 in Mali, and 43,000 in Niger.

The Arab slave trade was particularly gruesome, for much of it involved castrating black boys in the bush, with the most primitive of implements, in order to supply eunuchs for the Muslim harems. Many of the boys died during the surgery; many others died in the days afterwards from infections, or during the long trek by land and sea to the slave markets of Islam.

The historian Jan Hogedoorn, in his study of what he called *The Hideous Trade*, estimated the mortality rate for those castrated slaves as high as 80-90%, meaning only 10-20% of those African boys originally seized arrived alive at the slave markets. While the consensus estimate of 28 million black Africans who made it to the Islamic slave markets at first sounds like a lot, over 1300 years (650-1950 A.D.) this amounts to an average of a little more than 20,000 black slaves brought annually from Central and East Africa all the way to those slave markets, which is perfectly plausible.

**Assuming, then, the lowest mortality rates for both the castrated boys (80%), and the women and children (20%) enslaved, we arrive at a figure of 68 million Africans originally seized by Arab slavers.**

Now compare this with the Atlantic Slave Trade. Between 1525 and 1866, that is the entire history of the slave trade to the New World, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Database, 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the New World. Of those, 10.7 million survived the Middle Passage, to disembark in South America, the Caribbean, and North America. In the Atlantic Slave Trade, no boys were castrated – the slaves were intended for agricultural use – and the mortality rate, for the Middle Passage (the trip across the Atlantic) was far lower, from 10-15%. Nor did slaves in the Atlantic slave trade have to suffer a long trek across the Sahara, or from Central Africa to the Indian Ocean, as did the victims of the Arab slave trade.

**This means that the Muslim Arab slave trade involved almost five times as many Africans – 68 million instead of 12.5 million – as did the Atlantic Slave Trade.**

The slavers were Arabs, but the slaves they brought from Africa to market were sold not just in Arab lands, but also in Ottoman Turkey, and in Iran. Black slavery in Iran began even before the Islamic era, and continued until the early 20th century. Ayatollah Khamenei surely knows the history of these black slaves of Iranian masters. Why did he not take the occasion, even while deploring the hated American “racists,” to do the handsome thing and deeply, sincerely apologize for the past practice of slavery in Iran?

Instead, we do not hear a syllable of sorrow or remorse from Iran’s Supreme Leader, about the slave trade conducted by, and for Muslims, or about the African slaves held in Iran itself.

It is not just the Arab slave trade that deserves to be more widely known; Arabs and Muslims have been remarkably successful in keeping information about that trade from much of the world. We also need to make known the full extent of Arab (and Islamic) racism.

In attacking America for its “racism,” the Supreme Leader would no doubt like us to remain unaware of the virulent racism to be found in the works of Arab and Muslim Qur’anic

scholars, jurists, historians, and theologians. We need not do his bidding, but can take a look at the extensive evidence for Arab and Muslim racism. It's hair-raising.

Let's begin with the many Hadiths with racist implications, such as this: "Narrated Anas bin Malik: **The Prophet said to Abu-Dhar, "Listen and obey (your chief) even if he is an Ethiopian with a head like a raisin."** And this: Ahmad ibn Abi Sulayman, the companion of Sahnun said, "Anyone who says that **the Prophet was black should be killed.**" (Ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, Qadi 'Iyad, p. 375)

And there is this from the celebrated historian Al-Tabari: "**Noah prayed that the hair of Ham's descendants [Africans] would not grow beyond their ears, and that whenever his [Ham's] descendants met Shem's, the latter would enslave them.**" (Al-Tabari, Vol. 2, p. 21, p. 21)

Why was it so terrible for the Prophet to be called "black"? Because for the Arabs, blacks were unquestionably inferior. And therefore Prophet Muhammad could not possibly have been black. Such misidentification, according to Ahmad ibn Abi Sulayman, was an insult to the Prophet, and deserved death. Blacks, as descendants of Ham, are fit to be slaves (Shem's descendants "would enslave them").

**Many of the most famous Arab writers and Islamic scholars were certainly "racists" in the full meaning of that word.**

**Ibn Khaldun** (1332–1406) was, among other things, an Islamic jurist, Islamic lawyer, Islamic scholar, Islamic theologian, and hafiz (one who has memorized the entire Qur'an). He is one of the most important figures in Islamic history. Here are two (among many) remarks he makes about black Africans in his *Muqaddimah*:

**"Therefore, the Negro nation are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because [Negroes] have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of**

**dumb animals, as we have stated.”**

**“Beyond [known peoples of black West Africa] to the south there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves, and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings.”**

**Ibn Sina** or Avicenna (980-1037), was another celebrated figure in Islamic history: a Hafiz, an Islamic psychologist, scholar, and theologian and, by our lights, a deep-dyed racist: **“[Blacks are] people who are by their very nature slaves.”**

**Ibn Qutaybah** (828-889), was a renowned Islamic scholar from Kufa, Iraq: **“[Blacks] are ugly and misshapen, because they live in a hot country.”**

**Nasr al-Din al-Tusi** (1201-1274), was a Shia Muslim Scholar and Grand Ayatollah:

*“If (all types of men) are taken, from the first, and one placed after another, like the Negro from Zanzibar, in the Southern-most countries, the Negro does not differ from an animal in anything except the fact that his hands have been lifted from the earth –In no other peculiarity or property – except for what God wished. Many have seen that the ape is more capable of being trained than the Negro, and more intelligent.”*

*“[The Zanj (African) differ from animals only in that] their two hands are lifted above the ground,... Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and more intelligent than the Zanj.”*

**Al-Muqaddasi** (945/946-1000) was a medieval Muslim geographer:

*Of the neighbors of the Bujja, Maqdisi had heard that “there is no marriage among them; the child does not know his*

*father, and they eat people – but God knows best. As for the Zanj, they are people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair, and little understanding or intelligence.” [Kitab al-Bad’ wah-tarikh, vol.4]*

**Al-Masudi** (896-956), was a Muslim historian and geographer, known as the “Herodotus of the Arabs”:

**“Galen says that merriment dominates the black man because of his defective brain, whence also the weakness of his intelligence.”** (Al-Masudi, Muruj al-dhahab)

**Ibn al-Faqih was a Muslim historian and geographer:**

*“A man of discernment said: The people of Iraq ... do not come out with something between blonde, buff and blanched coloring, such as the infants dropped from the wombs of the women of the Slavs and others of similar light complexion; nor are they overdone in the womb until they are burned, so that the child comes out something between black, murky, malodorous, stinking, and crinkly-haired, with uneven limbs, deficient minds, and depraved passions, such as the Zanj, the Somali, and other blacks who resemble them. The Iraqis are neither half-baked dough nor burned crust but between the two.”* (from his Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan, 903 AD).

These are just a small sample of the racist remarks made by those whom Muslims regard as outstanding figures in Islamic intellectual history.

*“If you’re dark-skinned walking in the US, you can’t be sure you’ll be alive in the next few minutes.”*

Yes, let’s take another look at this charge by the Supreme Leader. Palpable nonsense, of course. It would be far truer to note the risks to life and limb you run, if you are identified as a Christian or a Jew or a Hindu, in any of a dozen Muslim

countries.

*According to Khamenei, US slave-traders “used to go and capture hundreds of thousands of men and women, old and young people with guns and other weapons which were not available to the people at the time.” These people, he said, “were taken to the US on those ships for slavery.”*

*The slave-owners “captivated [sic] free people who were living in their houses and in their own cities,” he continued, adding that the past of African-Americans is as evil as their present.*

Khamenei has a most imperfect grasp of history. The slavers (they were not all Americans) who conducted the Atlantic Slave Trade did not seize people “who were living in their houses”; they purchased African slaves from other Africans, who roamed the interior –where the Americans and Europeans never penetrated – kidnapping fellow Africans, in order to sell them to the trans-Atlantic slavers.

*Appealing to African-Americans, Khamenei said the “question of racism has not been solved yet in the country that claims to support freedom and human rights. A human, for his black skin, has no reassurance to live in society, if indeed, a police officer can beat him to death because of his colored skin.”*

African-Americans, claims the Supreme Leader, have “no reassurance [sic] to live in [American] society.” Really? When the radio and television nation-wide have nonstop coverage of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, when politicians compete to declare their sympathy for the victim and their anger at the police involved, when spokesmen for Black Lives Matter are all over the media and protesting noisily in the streets, when the policeman whose knee was on Floyd’s neck has been arrested for murder and rioters lay siege even to his



Florida vacation home, all this doesn't sound like "a police officer can beat [someone] to death" with impunity.

A police officer did not "beat him [George Floyd] to death because of his colored skin"; there was no "beating" but the wrongful, because unnecessarily prolonged, application of pressure to his neck to keep him subdued. Certainly such an application of force, while the victim for several minutes kept saying "I can't breathe," is unacceptable and will be punished – the police officer responsible has been arrested – but Khamenei is attempting to tar with the same absurd brush all 800,000 of the sworn police officers across America.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, has denounced the Atlantic Slave Trade carried on by Americans and Europeans, with nary a word about the other, much larger, longer lasting, and much crueler trade in African slaves, a trade marked especially by the castration of young boys in the bush, conducted by the Arabs. Fewer than 20% of those castrated survived both the operation and the trip to the slave markets of Islam. He, and we, deserve to know more about that slave trade and why it lasted so long.

Since he has raised the issues both of "slavery" and of "racism" in his indictment of America, we are entitled to pay him back in kind, and to examine the Arab slave trade, the Muslim slave-owners, and the virulent anti-black racism found in the works of so many notable figures in Arab and Islamic history. And that is what, in the paragraphs above, we have done. Under the circumstances, the Supreme Leader left us no choice.

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