
would have been low. Yet the Europeans did not even consider it. That "dog that did not bark," Eltis argues, may be the key to understanding the slave trade and the system it supported.

When Columbus arrived in America in the late 15th century, Eltis notes, almost all societies in the world accepted slavery as legitimate—but they differed greatly in their ideas about who could be legitimately enslaved. In Western Europe, virtually all natives of the subcontinent, including some who were nonwhite (but few who were non-Christian), were considered ineligible. A much more limited conception of "insider" had prevailed in Roman times, but the definition had become much broader by the 15th century. Not even criminals or prisoners could be turned into chattel slaves, if they were Europeans. Enslavement had become, in European eyes, "a fate worse than death and, as such, was reserved for non-Europeans." And the line dividing "insider" and "outsider," Eltis says, "was never drawn strictly in terms of skin color or race."

Among Africans and American Indians, however, much narrower notions of who should not be enslaved prevailed; immunity was usually confined to those who belonged to one's own tribe or nation. How, it is often asked, could Africans enslave other Africans and sell them into the slave trade? Nathan Huggins, author of *Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (1977), has replied that the enslavers saw neither themselves nor their victims as Africans.

Paradoxically, Eltis argues, the more Europeans rejected the enslavement of fellow Europeans, the more likely they were to contemplate enslaving non-Europeans. In a profound sense, Europeans' chattel slavery overseas resulted from the expansion of freedom at home. And yet that expansion—the idea that enslavement of Europeans anywhere was a wrong that needed to be righted—may have been the first step toward abolition of slavery generally.

"The central development shaping Western plantation slavery from the 16th century onward was the extension of European attitudes to the non-European world," Eltis writes. "If, by the 16th century, it had become unacceptable for Europeans to enslave other Europeans, by the end of the 19th century, it was unacceptable to enslave anyone."

Generation X: A Myth in the Making

"The Twentysomethings: 'Generation Myths' Revisited" by Everett Carll Ladd, in *The Public Perspective* (Jan.-Feb. 1993), The Roper Center, P.O. Box 440, Storrs, Conn. 06268-0440.

Much ink has been spilled about today's "Generation X," "twentysomethings," or—courtesy of Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of *ThirteenthGen.: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* (1993)—"thirteeners." (They claim that today's young people are "the 13th generation to know the U.S. flag and the Constitution.") By whatever name, this generation is said to be seething with resentment toward baby boomers. "Thirteeners," according to Howe and Strauss, "blame boomers for much that has gone wrong in their world." Ladd, editor of the *Public Perspective* (and a member of the Silent Generation), contends that all this—and indeed most of what is written about Generation X and other generations—is nonsense.

Some studies, such as Paul Light's *Baby Boomers* (1988), are serious and thoughtful, Ladd says, but most who write about the various generations serve up utterly unsubstantiated assertions. Survey researchers have found not the slightest evidence of any generalized Generation X resentment. And when it comes to unhappiness, there seems to be little difference between young and old. In a 1993 survey, 25 percent of those 18–29 years old said they were dissatisfied with their lives, while 26 percent of those 30–44, 28 percent of those 45–64, and 24 percent of those 65 and older said the same.

Most of those who write about generations, Ladd complains, confuse generational experiences and the effects of aging. "For various reasons, social and psychological, individuals as they grow older tend to move attitudinally toward more 'moderate' positions," Ladd notes. (Here, survey research simply confirms what Aristotle had to say on the subject in *Rhetoric*.) The fact that Americans under 30 are less likely to go to church than those over 50 does not mean that the "younger generation" is greatly different and will remain different when its members reach 50. It just means that they are behaving as young people generally do.

For the most part, survey research indicates that generational differences in social and politi-

cal outlook are slight. When social change does take place, Ladd notes, the young are likely to embrace it most fully. Twentysomethings today are the most likely of all age groups (89 percent of young women, 84 percent of young men) to reject the view that a woman's place is in the home.

Sometimes, Ladd acknowledges, decisive events do drill distinctive social and political

values into a generation. The Depression Generation, for example, has long leaned strongly toward the Democrats. The young people who have come of age politically since the late 1970s have sharply broken with the New Deal past: They have given a big share of their votes to the Republican Party. But that alone does not make the twentysomethings profoundly different from other generation.

PRESS & MEDIA

The Imperial Editors

"The New High-Tech Press Pack" by Tom Rosenstiel, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

There is nothing new about news editors using Associated Press (AP) or other "wire" stories to second-guess their own reporters. But informa-

tion technology has taken the second-guessing to new heights—and that is a very mixed blessing, according to Rosenstiel, who writes about politics and the media for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Editors at major news organizations now receive a torrent of information from third parties. Into the newsroom computers flow transcripts of all public utterances by the president and cabi-

The Corruption of Journalism

In *Nieman Reports* (Spring 1994), Michael J. O'Neill, former editor of the *New York Daily News*, limns the impact of moral relativism on the news media.

This is the central ethical problem facing the media today—the corruption of journalism by the culture of entertainment, by new technology that informs by image and emotion, and by an intellectual elitism that rejects objective rules of behavior in favor of limitless self-expression and moral relativism. "Why has moral discourse become unfashionable or merely partisan? . . ." asks the scholar James Q. Wilson. "Because we have learned . . . from intellectuals . . . that morality has no basis in science or logic. To defend morality is to defend the indefensible." The old rules based on moral intuitions have therefore been replaced, Wilson says, by a freedom-of-choice morality in which one picks and chooses values as casually as "ice cream flavors."

In this process, right and wrong become sub-

jective judgments rather than objective measures of human conduct. Reality and truth are only what we say they are—they have no existence outside our own fictions. Our celebration of laissez-faire lifestyles is extended to the outer frontiers of moral behavior. So we have the spectacle of producers not being the least bit troubled when they butcher facts, truth, and just about everything else to create fanciful docudramas like Oliver Stone's JFK. Or we see a Joe McGinniss cynically defending his departure from "traditional journalism" to steal from William Manchester, to invent quotes and private thoughts, and to create phony scenes in order to hype his own garbled version of Ted Kennedy's life. . . . Instead of outrage and denunciation, there is general acceptance.