

“The Qur’an Teaches That All Human Beings Are Equal”: Race (Part III)

by Hugh Fitzgerald

But what about John Esposito’s third claim, the one that is the focus of those Dallas billboards, about the supposed “racial equality” in Islam? There are a few passages, it is true, in the Qur’an, in which it is obliquely suggested that all men are equal, regardless of the “diversity of your color.” Here are the most quoted:

‘And mankind is naught but a single nation” (Quran 2:213)

“Among his signs is this, that he created you from dust. And then, behold, ye are men scattered (far and wide). “

“And among his signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations and diversity of your tongues and of your color, verily in that are signs for those who know.” (Qur’an 30.22)

“O mankind we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you and God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (Qur’an 49:13)

Nothing here suggests inequality among the various “nations and tribes,” what with everyone descended from the same couple, nor is there any ranking of the “diversity of tongues and colors,” and therefore, Muslims argue, these passages should be understood to express Islam’s belief in the equality of all mankind.

But there are other passages in the Islamic texts that suggest quite a different view of mankind, one where being black is regarded as a mark of inferiority. For example, what happens on the Day of Resurrection. Allah promises (Qur'an 3:185) that life in this world is an illusion, that every person shall die, and every person will receive his judgment on the resurrection day, and in Qur'an 5:26 that all that is on earth will perish. Allah says that He will reward the doers of good with paradise and much more; their faces will be radiant-stained [i.e. white]. They will never be humiliated. (Qur'an 10:26).

Here is more on "white faces" in the Qur'an, or in the exegeses to the Qur'an of Ibn Kathir, taken from postings by an ex-Muslim, Abul Kasem:

It is clear from the exegesis of these verses that Allah likes white people and dislikes the black people, so much so, in fact, that even when a Black Muslim is entitled to enter Islamic Paradise, he will not enter it until Allah has turned him into a white person. Verse 20:102 says that on the day the trumpet is sounded (resurrection day), the sinners will be gathered together with blue eyes and black faces. A hadith in Mishkat says that on judgment day, Muslims will have white faces, white arms, and white legs (Mishkat al-Masabih, Ibn Abdullah Tabrizi, Sheikh Wali-ud-Din Muahmmad, Tr. Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, Kitab Bhavan, 1784 Kalan Mahal, Daraya Ganj, New Delhi-110002, India.1990, p.1.168).

Allah's preference for light-skinned people and His disdain for dark-skinned people is repeated in verse 7:46. Ibn Abbas writes that this verse tells the joy of the believers when they know those who enter hell by their darkened faces and blue eyes and those who enter Paradise by their lightened faces: at once handsome and radiant.

Allah says in verse 86:8-9 that He will bring back life for Muhammad to commence judgment. According to ibn Kathir, on

resurrection day, a banner will be raised for every deceitful person from his anus; the size of this banner will depend on the size of the perpetrator's calumny. Thus, Muhammad will have no trouble sifting the believers from the non-believers. **All Muslims will be of white complexion, and all infidels will be of black complexion, with a banner on his/her anus.**

In verse 18:29 Allah says that He does not care whether people believe or disbelieve in Islam. The disbelievers (non-Muslims) and the wrongdoers will be surrounded by the tent of fire; they will be given water (acid) like molten brass to shower and to scald their faces. Ibn Kathir says that this verse means the water of Hell is black, and it itself is black and **its people are black.**

In verse 3:107 Allah emphatically pronounces that white faces on the judgment day will receive His mercy. Jalalyn writes that, **on judgment day, Muslims' faces will be white.**

In Mishkat (ibid, p.1.76) we read humans were emitted as white ants from Adam; paradise is for the whites, hell is for the blacks.

Islamic Paradise will offer its white male residents unlimited, unbridled, uninterrupted sex with houris of exquisite beauty. These houris will also be of fair (read white), radiant complexion (44:54, 55:70) quite similar to the Hollywood movie actresses. Even the wine-serving boys will be white, like pearls (52:24, 76:19).

There is more about "white" and "black" in Islam:

Muhammad was white, according to Sunaan Abu Dawud, 1.486.

In various Hadith Muhammad is asked for and described as **"This white man reclining on his arm."** Or when asked to describe him, another early Muslim said **"he was white."** And again: "And a white person who is requested to pray for rain. And yet again, the Prophet raised his hands so high that the

“whiteness of his armpits became visible.” And one more: **“He uncovered his thigh and I saw the whiteness of the thigh of the Prophet.”**

Here is one hadith from Sahih Bukhari (1.3.63) Narrated Anas bin Malik

“While we were sitting with the Prophet in the mosque, a man came riding on a camel. He made his camel kneel down in the mosque, tied its foreleg and then said: “Who amongst you is Muhammad?” At that time the Prophet was sitting amongst us (his companions) leaning on his arm. We replied, **“This white man reclining on his arm.”** The man then addressed him, “O Son of ‘Abdul Muttalib.”

Tabari writes that Muhammad was of **white complexion** (al-Tabari, Abu Ja’far Muhammad b. Jarir, History of al-Tabari, Translated by Ismail K. Poonwala. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, p.ix.157).

In Ash-Shifa, Allah, an apparently shared disdain among Muslims for black people is expressed in this manner:

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. Ash-Shifa. Tr. Aisha Abdarrahan Bewley. Medina Press, P.O. Box 5531, Inverness IV5 7YA, Scotland, UK, fifth print 2004, p.375)

Muhammad was white. His arms were white, his thighs were white, even his armpits were white. This was very important to establish. And **anyone who said he was black should be killed.** Then there is the hadith where God is said to divide humanity first into two groups, and then one of those groups divided further into three parts, and then He separated the “best” one of those three parts into two halves, with all non-Arabs in one half, and all Arabs in the other half. And then, God further divided the Arabs between those of the favored Quraysh tribe, and all the others. And finally, among

the Quraysh, the family of Muhammad is separated from all the others of the Quraysh tribe, as the very best of the “best of peoples.” This can be found in the well-known biography (Sira) of Muhammad by ibn Sa’d:

*...Abu Damarah al-Madani Anas Ibn ‘Iyad al-Laythi informed us; he said: Ja’far Ibn Muhammad Ibn ‘Ali informed us on the authority of his father, Muhammad Ibn ‘Ali ibn Husayn Ibn ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, who said: Verily the Prophet said: **God divided the earth in two halves and placed (me) in the better of the two, then He divided the half in three parts, and I was in the best of them, then He chose the Arabs from among the people, then He chose the Quraysh from among the Arabs, then He chose the children of ‘Abd al-Muttalib from among the Banu Hashim, then he chose me from among the children of ‘Abd al-Muttalib** (Ibn Sa’d, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad. Kitab al-Tabaqat, vol i. Translated in English by S. Moinul Haq, Kitab Bhavan, 1784, Kalan Mahal, Daraya Ganj, New Delhi, India, 1972, p1.2).*

Muhammad, then, is the best man from the best stock (the Quraysh) of the best people (the Arabs). And he is – this is also important – a white man, with white thighs, white armpits, white legs.

And the unflattering portrait of black men in the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sira should not be forgotten, even if John Esposito would prefer that you do so:

Umar, who was one of the Companions of Muhammad, and his friend, and his successor, after Ibn Bakr, as Caliph, had a profound dislike for black people

“Among them, with Muawiyah b. Hudhayl, were young men of black complexion and straight hair. ‘Umar turned his face away from them several times until it was said to him: “Do you have anything against these people.” He said: “I am perplexed with regard to them. No Arab tribe more hateful to

me than these has ever passed by me.” He then let them go, but he frequently mentioned them with hatred, and people were puzzled by ‘Umar’s attitude”.

Muhammad himself preached unquestioning obedience to authority in this way: “you should listen to and obey your ruler even if he was an Ethiopian (black) slave whose head looks like a raisin” (obey him, that is, *despite his being an Ethiopian*).

The constant references to Muhammad’s whiteness, the pejorative remarks made about black faces (the faces of those who on Judgment Day will go to hell are all black, while all those going to Heaven will have white “radiant” faces), the hatred that Umar, friend and companion to Muhammad, felt for blacks, the repeated statement that **“anyone who calls Muhammad a black man ‘should be killed,’”** strongly suggest that in Islam the importance placed on the superiority of the white Quraysh tribe undercuts Esposito’s claims about a lack of “racial inequality” in Islam.

And what is the evidence for racial discrimination in the practice of Islam? First, of course, is the matter of slavery. Muslims recognized slavery as legitimate, given that Muhammad, the Perfect Man and Model of Conduct, had slaves, even bought and sold them. But, it should be conceded, those enslaved could be black or white. More than one million Europeans were enslaved by Arabs who raided the coasts of Europe over the centuries, or attacked Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. But the slave trade developed by the Muslim Arab slavers was almost entirely about enslaving blacks. The Arabic word for “slave” – *abd* – became synonymous with “black.” That African slave trade involved tens of millions of black Africans – estimates are that 85 million blacks, mostly women, and children, were taken by Arab slavers from Africa (some estimates run much higher). Only 20% of them, or 17 million, survived the journey.

There was another aspect to the trade in black African slaves by Arab slavers that distinguished it from the Atlantic trade: the women were used as concubines, and the boys made into eunuchs for work in the harems. These black slaves were far more numerous than the white slaves whom North African Arabs captured in their raids along the European coasts, or when they preyed on Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. Black Africans were thought to be ideal for the Arab harems. In *The Hideous Trade*, Jan Hogedorn describes how young black boys were captured in the bush, then castrated on the spot, and those who survived the painful and dangerous operation would then be brought by coffle and dhow to the slave markets of Islam, including Jiddah, Cairo, and Constantinople. Jan Hogedorn estimates that only 10% of those boys originally captured survived both the castration and the journey, and were still alive to be sold in those slave markets.

Already in the ninth century, blacks were imported by the Arabs into southern Iraq and put to work as enslaved agricultural laborers; their harsh treatment by the Arabs led to the Zanj Rebellion in southern Iraq, from 869 to 883 A.D., and its bloody suppression. From then on, all African blacks were commonly referred to by Arabs as the "Zanj." The Arabs always regarded the blacks with contempt, many of them likening those they called "Zanj" to animals. It is startling to read what famous figures in Islamic history had to say about the black Africans.

The celebrated Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, for example, one of the most important figures in Islamic cultural history, wrote that "the Zanj are people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair, and **little understanding or intelligence.**" And he repeats this judgement, in different sauces, again and again.

The geographer al-Idrisi ascribes "lack of knowledge and defective minds" to the black peoples. Their ignorance, he says, is notorious; men of learning and distinction are almost unknown among them, and their kings only acquire what

they know about government and justice from the instruction of learned visitors from farther north.

Like the crow among mankind are the Zanj for they are the worst of men and the most vicious of creatures in character and temperament.

We know that the Zanj (blacks) are the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind, and the least capable of understanding the consequences of actions.

Their nature is that of wild animals. They are extremely black. [About the Sudan:] Among themselves there are people who steal each other's children and sell them to the merchants when the latter arrive.

The Zanj are so uncivilized that they have no notion of a natural death. If a man dies a natural death, they think he was poisoned. Every death is suspicious with them, if a man has not been killed by a weapon.

Ibn Battuta is regarded not as a tangential figure, but rather as the most important Muslim traveler of all time (he claimed Berber descent, but the Arabs were eager to claim him, too); Morocco has even named a ship after him. His views on blacks, then, cannot be easily dismissed or deliberately ignored as those of a minor figure.

Then there are the statements of Ibn Khaldun, that most famous of all Arab (or more exactly, Berber) historiographers and historians. His remarks on black Africans rival those of Ibn Battuta for what we today would have no difficulty in describing as racism. Those below are taken from his celebrated *Muqaddimah* (or *Prolegomena*):

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.

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.

Many similar examples might be given, and not only from Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Battuta. But surely what has been adduced so far is sufficient to conclude that whatever statements can be found in the Qur'an to suggest that "racial equality" is part of Islam – these being statements not precisely about "racial equality" but rather, of the "all men share the same origins" sort, which is a different thing – many more statements can be found, especially in the Hadith, to support the opposite view. Muhammad is "white," the texts insist, and anyone who says he is black should be killed. Some of Allah's remarks, too, about who will be white and who black on the Day of Resurrection, and even more, statements by Umar, Muhammad's friend, who then became the second Caliph in the Rashidun Caliphate, can clearly be described as racist.

Slavery and inequality are part of the DNA of Islam. And since that exemplar of conduct, Muhammad, was a slaveowner, at no time did Muslims try to stop their own slave trade. There never was a Muslim William Wilberforce. It was the Royal Navy halted the Arab trade in African slaves. And while the slave trade was officially outlawed in the West in the 19th century, it continued right up to the late 20th century in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and formally outlawed in those two countries as late as 1962. In the Sudan, from 1983 to 2005, during the Second Sudan War, Arabs again enslaved blacks. And even now, blacks continue to be enslaved, despite treaties and entreaties, by Arabs in Mauritania and Mali. Given the general

inattention to the history of Arab attitudes toward, and exploitation of, black Africans, and the widespread ignorance about anti-black racism among Muslim Arabs, and the Arab slave trade in Africa, those Muslims now putting up billboards in Dallas are probably right to be secure in their belief that if they put up such a statement as **ISLAM = Racial Equality** no one will call them on it. And no one in Dallas has.

When John Esposito declares that **“the Quran teaches that all human beings are equal, regardless of race, sex or beliefs,”** he is wrong, and not innocently so, in each of his three claims. He knows, but hopes you don't, that in the Qur'an, the immutable word of God, Muslims are the “best of peoples” (3:110) and non-Muslims “the vilest of creatures” (98:6). And wrong, too, are these Come-To-Islam billboards that shamelessly assert that ISLAM=Racial Equality. What can one do? One way to deal with this disinformation campaign is to write to the Dallas News, explaining, in necessarily abridged fashion, what the Qur'an and other Islamic texts really say about distinctions – discriminations – based on race, sex, and (religious) beliefs.

But it would be far better if billboard were to answer billboard, and for every misleading message put up by Muslim propagandists, a different and truthful message that shines a light on unflattering aspects of Islam should be put up in answer. For example, one such billboard could be devoted to the subject of **The Arab Slave Trade**. It would consist of a map of Africa and of the Middle East, clearly showing where the Arab slave traders seized their booty, and the routes they used, and how many slaves survived – especially among the African boys they caught and castrated in the bush – to make it alive to the slave markets of Islam, which can also be shown on the map. And there should be room to include information (billboards are big, use all that space) about when that slave trade began, what was its geographical extent, what means were used to capture the slaves, how they were

transported to the slave markets of Islam, then bought by whom, and for what purposes. And what were the total number of black Africans taken as slaves, and how did that number compare with the size of the Atlantic slave trade, this being a question that ought to receive more attention, because it turns out that the Arab slave trade began much earlier, lasted much longer, and claimed far more victims, than did the Atlantic slave trade about which we hear so much. One striking statistic among many: the mortality rate for slaves crossing the Atlantic was 10%, while the mortality rate for those transported from Africa to Arabia was between 80 and 90%. Possibly African-Americans may become less enthusiastic about Islam when they learn about this kind of thing.

Another billboard's text would be devoted to **The Eradication of the Arab Slave Trade**. It would explain that because Muhammad was a slaveowner (that revelation should infuriate quite a few Muslims), slavery remains permanently legitimate in Muslim eyes. That is why eradication of the Arab slave trade came long after it was ended in the West. Further information should be given about how the Royal Navy halted the Arab slave trade, though it took much longer to end slavery itself. Most telling are three years when Muslim states outlawed slavery. Note should be made that Saudi Arabia and Yemen, countries that finally succumbed to Western pressure, and outlawed slavery as late as 1962. And even today, that billboard should explain, in several Arab states – Mauritania, Mali, Sudan – Arabs are still enslaving black Africans. That might at least make some people stop and think and wonder, and begin to search for more information about the Arab slave trade. And that's exactly what you want.

Still a third billboard might be devoted to **Racism In Arab Islam**. On this billboard, quotes about the "whiteness" of Muhammad, and the death penalty proposed for anyone who dared to call him "black," could be followed by some of the more appalling remarks on blacks by Caliph Umar, and by Ibn Khaldun

and Ibn Battuta. That should flutter the dovescotes among the Muslim propagandists in Dallas, who never expected to be refuted in such a way.

And all three of these billboards, and others in the same vein, should have in large letters placed below the text, a statement now turned upon itself and made into an unanswerable question. To wit: **"Racial Equality In Islam?"** That should be enough. Even, at this point, as an opening salvo, more than enough.