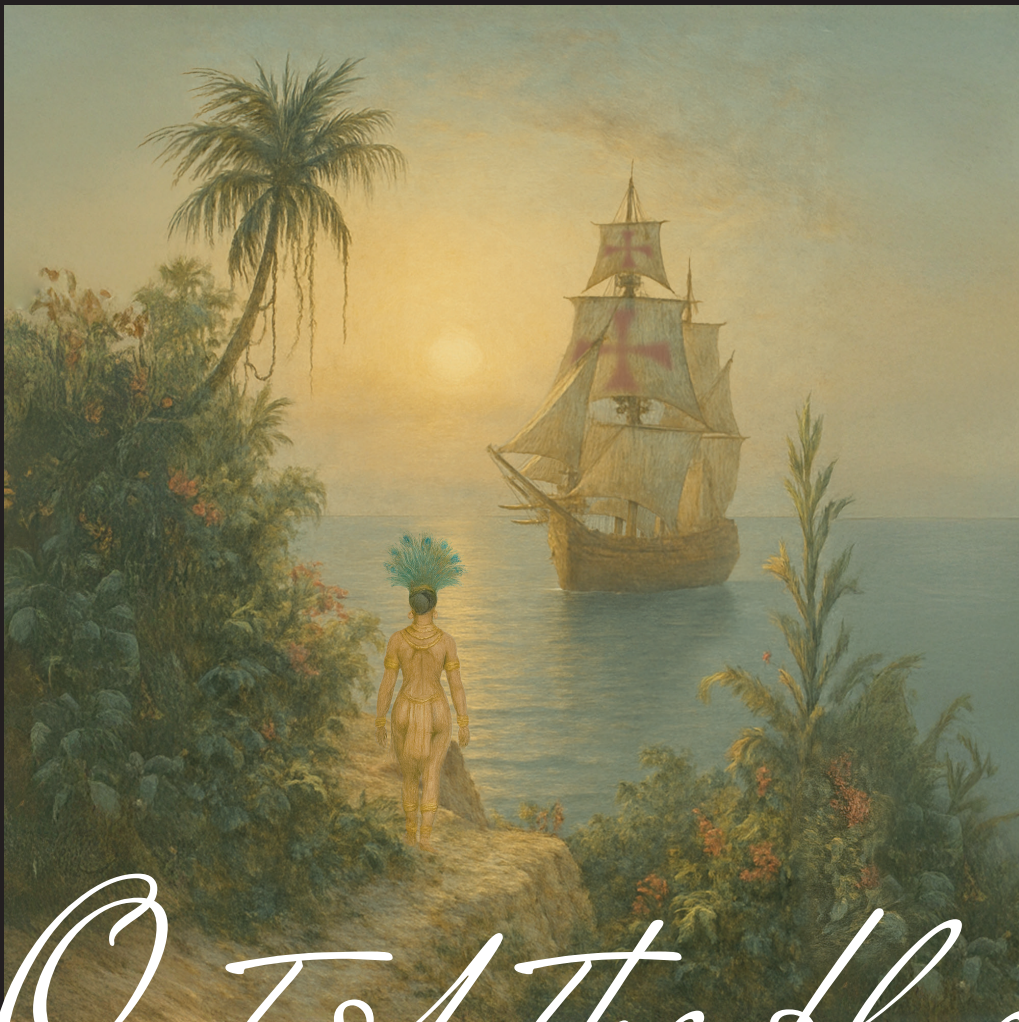


Evening Primrose™

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Out of the Blue

WRITTEN BY MARK-ANDRÉ

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Written by Mark-André Macao

Martiniquan,
Caribbean,
Afro-descendant?
Who am I not ?

Introduction

The Black population rooted in North America, South America, and the Caribbean exists because of a colonial system called the Atlantic slave trade. Today, as Afro-descendants, we are the descendants of the survivors of this organized commerce. This system, which lasted for about 400 years, was created by the Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, and Dutch monarchies to orchestrate and finance the colonization of an entire continent.

At the dawn of colonization, the peoples of this so-called “New World” ([see list](#)) were driven from their lands. Labeled “savages” by colonizers, they were killed or enslaved. Many died en masse from conflicts, forced labor, or diseases carried by contact epidemics. Others fled or made capture difficult. In vast territories, Indigenous populations were too dispersed to be enslaved efficiently. All of these challenges forced Europeans to rethink their colonial projects in order to make the exploitation of these lands possible. Among other things, they gave birth to a commerce that would plunge the world into a senseless capitalist spiral, one that still oppresses us today.

Between the 15th and 19th centuries, our African ancestors were torn from their homes and used as labor for colonial expansion. Around 12 million Africans were deported, sorted, and scattered across the Americas according to the colonizers’ needs, especially in regions lacking labor or difficult to exploit. Over time, depending on the place of deportation, our ancestors transformed these colonized lands into new homes.

In this article, I speak of Afro-descendants because it concerns me directly. But the colonial history of the Americas is vast, and each story deserves attention. Even in regions where the deportation of Black populations was less significant, they were still victims of colonization. These regions, today independent countries, still carry European legacies in their religions, their languages...

MISUNDERSTOOD HUMAN

It is sometimes difficult to grasp the origins, the culture, the mindset of a person or a community. Because these are the sum of two stories: the one written by their ancestors, and the one lived personally, a daily existence, a lived reality. Together, they shape the lifestyle, the passions, the art, the emotions of a person or a group.

Misunderstanding, beyond a simple question, is like a barrier between two worlds. Two different visions, two different ideologies, unable to coexist because they stand in opposition. This feeling can become a burden when you are treated differently or judged, without the authors realizing the harm or discomfort they cause. Or when inequalities, injustices, and mistakes of the past keep feeding those of the present. It is like living in an organized fatality, surrounded by injustices made invisible, perceived as normal.

That is why it is essential to know and share our history, so we can defend it when it is questioned or minimized, and so we can show the impact it still has on us. For this reason, I have structured my narrative into three major points, often sources of misunderstanding.

MISUNDERSTOOD ORIGINS

Today we are Americans, South Americans, Caribbeans. Or perhaps Trinidadians, Brazilians, Cubans, Barbadians. Or maybe from Jamaica, Louisiana, Guadeloupe, Saint Lucia. Identity markers without end, binding us forever to the places where our closest ancestors lived and grew.

Some are Anglophones, others Hispanophones, Francophones, or Lusophones. As Afro-descendants, it is our colonial and postcolonial history that has shaped our present-day origins. A unique story, written by our ancestors and dictated by the places of deportation, the languages imposed and adopted, the mixing of populations, and later, migrations of labor. All these variables shape our identities as individuals, and more broadly as a community.

Over time, Black, Indigenous, and white populations, along with waves of migration that followed, have mixed. But the story of these mixtures differs across regions. In North America, for example, mixing carries a heavy legacy. After slavery, segregationist ideologies kept communities apart for decades. Later, when segregation ended, in a country where the white population was far greater than elsewhere, intermixing increased. Yet the scars of segregation remain visible today. In South America, colonial and religious ideologies widely spread the belief in “white superiority.” Populations mixed, but these ideologies created a social hierarchy based on skin color. And then came another key chapter, post-slavery: labor migrations.

In search of a better life, many of our parents left to work and settle far from home. This immigration of opportunity began at the end of slavery and continues today. Departing, sometimes in waves, for the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, allowed them to escape hardship while answering a demand for labor, often in low-status jobs. Figures like Basquiat, Malcolm X, and so many others are children of this migration.

MISUNDERSTOOD CULTURE

The division of the American continent by Europeans was a source of many conflicts. It also drew the borders we know today. These territories became states, nations, islands, boundaries carved by colonization. This fragmentation, along with the history of each region, not only determined our origins but also shaped our cultures. Today, depending on the region, cultures may differ greatly or, at times, appear very similar. Cultures born from a colonial history, written in parallel with the context and hardships endured. Ancestral heritage, the origin of the colonizer, the nature of imposed labor, rules and restrictions, later cultural blends. All these variables lie at the heart of our cultures and often shape our artistic, culinary, and musical sensibilities. A striking example that directly shaped African American culture: cotton exploitation.

Our African ancestors came from many different peoples, which is why in some places we find multiple African roots in our cultures. On these new lands, they carried forward their heritage, a way of staying connected to Africa. A memory transmitted through rhythms, dances, instruments, customs, languages, foods, later blending with others over time. Examples like Bomba, Gwo ka, and Capoeira are deeply African-rooted cultural forms, developed during slavery. The encounter and fusion of African, Indigenous, and European..., cultures is perhaps the most important factor explaining the immense cultural diversity across the Americas. But I will not expand here, it is too deep, too complex, too alive and ever-changing. What matters is this: blending is almost omnipresent in our cultures today. It began during slavery and has continued to flourish since, sometimes spontaneous, sometimes deliberate, always creative, often meant to build a common legacy.

In the colonies, daily life and social conditions were imposed by laws or by masters. Slaves were restricted in every way, limited in their possibilities. They had to adapt, to create new ways of living within this confinement. Later, after slavery, and even in our modern societies, this same pattern of creativity born from lack of freedom continued. Capoeira, gospel, steelpan, jazz, hip-hop... A conditioning also found in food, with Brazilian Feijoada for example, a dish inspired by the meals of enslaved people who cooked beans with the leftover meat of their masters. The ultimate example of vital creativity, in spite of the conditions imposed.

Culture, in a broader sense, is what we share most dearly within our community. Values, habits, passions, ways of life... a collection of things unique to us, that gather us, bind us, and that we owe to our common history. Things sometimes judged or interpreted differently by others. Loving the jewelry we wear around our necks, for example.

Culture is also a heritage left to us by our ancestors, and one that we will pass on to future generations. Each of us has the duty to honor this heritage and to help it evolve positively, “it’s for the culture!” As a community, we face the same realities and the same struggles, which creatively inspire some. The talent of the communities that gave birth to jazz, rap, dancehall, or reggae comes from their will to tell their stories and denounce the deep injustices of their daily lives. For them, it was a way to express and share their mindset, their daily reality, and their hopes through music. This originality and this freedom found in their art and their way of life embody the authenticity of these cultures. A creativity and genius that can be found in every possible form of art, continually enriching the legacy we will leave behind. If we take the example of music: R&B, salsa, merengue, samba, reggaeton, zouk, kompa... An endless list that proves life has triumphed, and that from this chapter of History arose human beings both inspired and inspiring.

MISUNDERSTOOD MINDSET

To resist an oppressive system, we fought through revolts, struggles, movements, philosophies, countless battles for our emancipation. Among the best known: the victory and independence of Haiti, the Civil Rights Movement, Pan-Africanism, Rastafarianism. A spirit of emancipation cultivated since slavery itself, with marronage, or “runaway slaves” in the United States, which allows us today to be regarded differently than our ancestors.

The ideologies at the root of colonization and slavery justified domination by racial superiority. Mixed with a lust for grandeur, faced with new lands and their abundant resources, immorality took over, choosing human and mental exploitation instead of outright genocide. The Atlantic slave trade took shape, and from that moment capitalism changed dimension. It became unreasonable, then gradually a source of global competition and tension. Over time, racial superiority was challenged and could no longer hold. It shifted, justifying domination instead through economic superiority. You are free, but you are poor! You have no land to cultivate, no house, but work, and you will be paid.

Societies have evolved, every man has become a slave to money, and we, slaves to money and to our past. A past that collectively keeps us in a position of the dominated and the foreign. Even though we took part in building the hegemony of these countries over the world, setting aside our own development and delaying our intellectual and industrial sovereignty. First with slavery, then with successive waves of labor migrations to the metropolises. Dependence on money and limited opportunities created competition, pushing many to the margins of society, often the same ones.

Money divides, defines us socially, deepens inequality of opportunity. A fatality takes shape. Accused of bringing insecurity, those on the margins become targets. An infernal cycle that oppresses us all today, and even more those communities still haunted by their past.

A summary that shows clearly how the system was built on foundations of domination that never truly disappeared. We are free today, but it is only an illusion of freedom and equality. In truth, our ancestors always fought for our emancipation. They were inspiring in their relentless search for justice and freedom. These struggles form a heritage, carrying a message that can be summed up like this:

«Never stop fighting and standing against injustice or against an oppressive system. Be proud of your history, of who you are. Fight for your emancipation, rise together, for unity is strength. Continue to create, even if the system does everything to stop you. Use your history as motivation, but never let it dictate your future. Nothing will be easy, but everything you do, do it with passion.»

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Annexe

Inuit – Yupiks – Sioux – Cheyennes – Haidas – Tlingits
– Iroquois – Algonquins – Aztecs – Toltecs – Mayas –
Zapotecs – Mixtecs – Chorotegas – Ngäbe-Buglés – Incas
– Quechuas – Aymaras – Yanomamis – Kayapos – Guara-
nis – Mapuches – Tehuelches – Taínos – Kalinagos...



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