

THE BLACK EUNUCHS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: NETWORKS OF POWER IN THE COURT OF THE SULTAN

Dr. George H. Junne, Jr. University of Northern Colorado

Eunuchism, or the practice of making eunuchs, is an ancient one that is traced back to both the Far and Near East. Chinese, Arab and Mesopotamian Empires all used eunuchs, sometimes in armies, courts, in government and in other positions. The Ottoman Empire did not create the system of employing them in state positions but inherited that practice from the Byzantines.

This presentation explores the roles of the Ottoman Empire's Chief Black Eunuchs (CBEs), including early capture in Africa, how they obtained power, the scope of their powers, their wealth, and their administrative and religious duties. Further, this research delves into a little-researched topic, that of attempts of CBEs to create or recreate families that they remembered from Africa. The results indicate that although the CBEs could be extremely powerful and rich, some still pined for their families that many lost as children and therefore, some married and/or adopted children. Further, although they were eunuchs, many indulged in sexual activities.

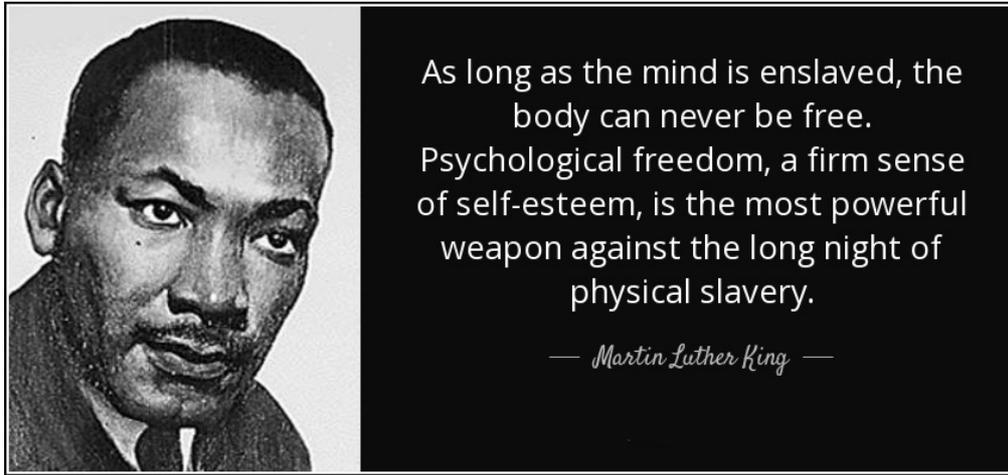
New World slavery has generated many slave narratives. However, the personal experiences and perceptions of the Ottoman institution of slavery by the slaves themselves, specifically eunuchs have not, with few exceptions, surfaced. It is hoped that this presentation might spur others to continue this research.

Biography: Dr. George H. Junne, Jr.

Dr. Junne is Professor and Coordinator of Africana Studies at the University of Northern Colorado. His specialty is African American history and culture. He has written on the African American town of Dearfield, Colorado, and Black eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire. His book, *The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire: Networks of Power in the Court of the Sultan*, was published in 2016.

During the summers, Dr. Junne is a fossil collector for the University of Michigan Museum of Paleontology. He also works with UNC archaeology crews at North Park, Colorado on Native American historical sites. Since the year 2000, Junne has been a visiting professor at Bogazici University in Istanbul. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.

Abstract



Layered Bondage: A Bumpy Road from Slavery to Liberation

Taking a period of 155 years (from the enactment of the 13th Amendment in 1865 to the present) into consideration, my talk sets out to posit that the history of African Americans in the United States is a complex one that defies simplistic readings. It would be a grave error to start with the premise that slavery ended in 1865 and black people were liberated. On that date, a giant step was taken and the institution of slavery was officially abolished -- non-arguably a gigantic step towards freedom. However, this talk will problematize the term 'enslavement' and question whether liberation has actually been achieved.

To that end, I would like to start my talk with the assertion that free men and women can be enslaved – a paradox that stems from African American cultural theory, art, and literature of the last 155 years. W.E.B. Du Bois' renowned concept of 'double consciousness' coupled with Jung's 'collective unconscious' serves to delineate the complexity of enslavement. Hence, it is imperative that enslavement/bondage be regarded as a multi-layered construct that should be stripped of its outer coatings to be laid bare.

African American history foregrounds a long and painful journey on a bumpy road. There is no linear progression in the history of black people in the United States; their history does not move in straight lines but it zigzags forwards and backwards. The unreliability of the progress that has been made towards freedom and equality attests to the fact that enslavement should not be considered passé; it is ever-present in the deep recesses of the African American psyche.

This talk is an overview of this perennial enslavement exposed through selected examples of African American poetry and drama, as well as social, cultural, and political key events.

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Recent publications:

- ‘Transformative Shocks: War Trauma in David Rabe’s *Sticks and Bones* and Sam Shepard’s *States of Shock*.’ *Topography of Trauma: Fissures, Disruptions and Transfigurations*, edited by Danielle Schaub. Leiden: Brill Press, 2019.

- ‘The Arch of Piteresque Drama: Power and Evil.’ *Piercing the Shroud: Distabilizations of Evil*, edited by Rallie Murray. Leiden: Brill Press, 2019.