

Chocolate, Race, and the Atlantic World: A Bittersweet History

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RESÜMEE

Vor dem Hintergrund des Black Atlantic argumentiert der vorliegende Artikel, dass Kakao/Schokolade und Blackness vielschichtig – auf diskursiven und materiellen Ebenen – miteinander verknüpft sind. Es waren seit dem frühen 20. Jahrhundert in erster Linie versklavte schwarze Subjekte, die die Kakaobohnen auf Plantagen in Westafrika ernteten, und diese Produktionsbedingungen fanden nicht nur Eingang in das semantische Feld rund um Schokolade, in dem diese als exotisches Genussmittel, als Aphrodisiakum, oder als Luxusgut konstruiert worden ist, sondern auch in die visuelle Bildsprache von Schokoladenreklame, die häufig koloniale Phantasiewelten evozierte, in denen „exotische“ Menschen an „tropischen“ Orten Kakao ernteten. Schokolade fungiert hier, in Anlehnung an Roland Barthes, als Mythos, denn es erscheint in den Quellen selbsterklärend und vermeintlich „natürlich“, warum ein ehemals koloniales Produkt mit (Imaginationen von) Blackness verwoben wird. Interessanterweise taucht chocolate in afrikanisch-amerikanischen kulturellen Kontexten aber auch als affirmative und positiv konnotierte Selbstbezeichnung auf, und – im Gegensatz zu Deutschland – als emanzipatorische und häufig sexuell aufgeladene Aufforderung einer positiven Identifikation mit Blackness.

1. Introduction

Chocolate moved across the Atlantic not only in a very material sense as a commodity, but also as a cultural symbol and as a myth. Ships that left West African colonies for North American and Western European metropolises in the early twentieth century carried with them not only the raw product the consumers clamored for, but also a very condensed, distorted, and aestheticized projection of the conditions of labor on the plantations. In turn, this “ensemble” of materiality and symbolism of chocolate has found its way into popular culture where it has not simply been used, but transformed and

remetaphorized in many different ways. Following some brief remarks on the concept of the Black Atlantic, this contribution will firstly reflect on the symbolic meanings chocolate is endowed with; meanings that are also consumed when indulging in chocolate. Secondly, it will elaborate on the modes of chocolate production by means of a specific example from Portuguese West Africa around 1900, and contrast these politics of labor with the visual representations at work in an exemplary historical chocolate advertisement. Finally, it will analyze the use of chocolate on a semantic level and look at how it operates as a racial signifier for Blackness in (African) America.

2. The Black Atlantic as a Circum-Atlantic World

This essay is written from a transcultural and transnational perspective, investigating where and when the chocolate signifier operates within – in Paul Gilroy’s words – “the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation I call the black Atlantic.”¹ What I am concerned with here are places around the Atlantic, not just the Atlantic itself. Historian David Armitage has identified three types of Atlantic history, “circum-Atlantic history,” which takes the Atlantic unit as a whole; “trans-Atlantic history,” which emphasizes a comparative approach; and “cis-Atlantic history,” which looks at a particular place within an Atlantic context”.² This paper is situated between a circum-Atlantic and a cis-Atlantic perspective; its underlying assumption is that the Atlantic is a useful unit of analysis because not only people but also commodities like cocoa link the Atlantic world through production, consumption, and commerce, as much as ideas, discourses, and modes of representations do.³

Joseph Roach, building on Gilroy’s seminal work, proposes an expansion of the transnational and transatlantic perspectives by defining the circum-Atlantic world as follows: “As it emerged from the revolutionized economies of the late seventeenth century, this world resembled a vortex in which commodities and cultural practices changed hands many times. The most revolutionary commodity in this economy was human flesh, and not only because slave labor produced huge quantities of the addictive substances – sugar, coffee, tobacco, and, most insidiously, sugar and chocolate in combination – that transformed the world economy and financed the Industrial Revolution (Mintz). The concept of a circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas – North and South – in the creation of the culture of modernity.”⁴

1 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London/New York 1993, p. 4.

2 Quoted from Alison Games, *Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities*, in: *The American Historical Review*, 111 (2006) 3, n. pag.; see also: David Armitage, *Three Concepts of Atlantic History*, in: id. (ed.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, Basingstoke 2002, pp. 11–27.

3 A. Games, *Atlantic History* (footnote 2), n. pag.

4 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performances*, New York 1996, p. 4.

Roach's concept of the circum-Atlantic bounded by Europe, Africa, and the Americas is quite useful for emphasizing the diasporic dimensions and circulations in this region. He is not only concerned with the movement of commodities like sugar and cocoa, or ideas and discourses within a Black Atlantic. Equally important are the forced movements of human beings, that is to say, the massive enslavement of African peoples. As becomes apparent later, chocolate could not have become a daily indulgence for consumers in North America and Western Europe without slavery and forced labor practices on cocoa plantations around the turn of the twentieth century.⁵

3. The Politics of Desiring Chocolate

Monographs on the history of commodities like salt, sugar, tea, cocoa, and coffee have come to constitute a discrete genre widely read by the public. Besides scholarly works, there is a plethora of popular books on the history of chocolate, cookbooks with chocolate recipes, exhibitions on chocolate with accompanying catalogs, richly illustrated coffee table books, restaurants specializing in chocolate desserts, and chocolate boutiques selling expensive gourmet chocolate. Sidney Mintz reasons that this might be due to the "rediscovery of the role individual commodities came to play in the rise of capitalism."⁶ A lot of the publications, however, focus solely on the consumption and the cultural impact of the products in North America and Western Europe.⁷ Yet, in my view, the various nodal points of the commodity web – the production, the trade, the consumption, as well as the agents at these stages – should be taken into account. What complicates matters is the historical connection between the production, marketing, and consumption of this commodity on the one hand, and its involvement of Black subjects on the other. For

- 5 One should note that these modes of production are still applicable today. Child slave labor as well as precarious labor practices are common features of the cocoa business as the work of several NGOs and journalists has shown. See, for instance: Carol Off, *Bitter Chocolate: The Dark Side of the World's Most Seductive Sweet*, New York 2008; Kathrin Burger, *So süß und doch so bitter: Die Deutschen lieben Schokolade und wissen oft nicht um die menschenunwürdigen Bedingungen im Kakaoanbau*, in: *Die Zeit*, 17 December 2009, <http://www.zeit.de/2009/52/Kakao> (accessed on 1 September 2011); Cat Cox, *Chocolate Unwrapped: The Politics of Pleasure*, London 1993; see also the BBC-documentary *Slavery: A Global Investigation* from 2004, <http://www.stwr.org/africa/slavery-a-global-investigation.html> (accessed on 1 September 2011). The film can be seen at <http://freedomdocumentaries.org/film.php?id=192> (accessed 1 September 2011); see also: Anti-Slavery International, *Trafficking of children in West Africa - focus on Mali and Côte d'Ivoire*. (<http://www.antislavery.org/archive/other/trafficking-children-wafrica.htm>, accessed June 4, 2008).
- 6 Sidney W. Mintz, *The Bromides of God, the Passions of Humans: Review of Histoire du Chocolat* (Harwich) and *The Chocolate Tree* (Young), in: *New West Indian Guide*, 70 (1996) 1&2, pp. 107-108.
- 7 See, among others: Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*, New York 2003; Peter L. Bernstein, *The Power of Gold: The History of an Obsession*, New York 2004; Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed Our World*, New York 1999; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft: Eine Geschichte der Genussmittel*, Frankfurt am Main 2002; Susan J. Terrio, *Crafting the Culture and History of French Chocolate*, Berkeley 2000; Nikita Harwich, *Histoire du Chocolat*, Paris 1992; Annerose Menninger, *Genuss im kulturellen Wandel: Tabak, Kaffee, Tee und Schokolade in Europa (16.-19. Jahrhundert)*, Stuttgart 2004. Even the authoritative scholars on chocolate, Sophie and Michael Coe, barely mention slavery and slave labor in their 'true history of chocolate', but focus on chocolate as consumed in Central America and its trajectory in Europe, see: Sophie D. Coe/Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, London 2007.

the study of cocoa and chocolate, a more thorough inquiry reveals that there has indeed been a long-standing connection between cocoa/chocolate and Black people. And this connection has a symbolic as well as an economic dimension to it. Because chocolate is a myth, it is this mythical, symbolic element of chocolate that obfuscates the social and economic realities in the cocoa business, which only make possible the temptation chocolate has to offer.

Accordingly, what I am interested in here is exploring the antagonistic aspects of chocolate and the tensions that are thus produced. Historically, it has been a colonial commodity linked to slave labor and to the exploitation of Black people as a cheap work force. Unsurprisingly, however, this aspect is completely transformed and revalorized in the history of chocolate marketing.

Moreover, as I am going to elaborate on in the last part of this paper, chocolate is not only a product heavily tainted by historical and contemporary exploitation and child slave labor; it has also been used as a floating signifier and as a naming practice in various discursive spaces to construct images of Blackness. Used as an affirmative self-reference in many African American cultural productions (often framed as a sexual innuendo), it celebrates the diversity and beauty of skin shades and its appeal is derived from the many likeable associations attached to chocolate, foremost the myth that chocolate is an aphrodisiac.

3.1 The (Imaginary) Potential of Chocolate

Chocolate is endowed with various positive connotations. It is usually, as far as the popular milk chocolate is concerned, sweet (and, significantly, sweet products like honey, brown sugar, sugar, and chocolate are often used as terms of endearment), though, in the case of very dark chocolate, also bitter. These characteristics in the flavor of chocolate make for a metaphorical duplicity; the sweetness and the bitterness of milk versus dark chocolate relate to the friction I am concerned with. On the one hand the “sugary” qualities of chocolate, yet on the other hand the bitter, harsh realities of an exploitative business. Similar to other products such as coffee or sugar, chocolate once signified luxury and it continues to be regarded as a reward, an instant gratification, and as something that affords the consumer with psychological and physical pleasure. Chocolate is not only valued for its taste, but also for its stimulation of the olfactory, visual, and affective senses.⁸ Up to the nineteenth century, it awarded its consumers with social prestige because it was a costly luxury.⁹ From a Western European and North American perspective, it carried an “exotic” connotation because it can only be cultivated in countries with a

8 Marcy Norton, *Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics*, in: *The American Historical Review*, 111 (2006) 3, pp. 660–691. On the conception of chocolate (and of coffee, tea, tobacco, etc.) as a drug, see, among others: A. Menninger/Katharina Niemeyer (eds.), *Drogen: Aspekte einer globalen Konsumgeschichte*, in: *zeitenblicke*, 8 (2009) 3, p. 3.

9 James Walvin, *A Taste of Empire: 1600–1800*, in: *History Today*, 47 (1997) 1, pp. 11–16, p. 12; Mort Rosenblum, *Chocolate: A Bittersweet Saga of Dark and Light*, New York 2005, p. 14.

tropical climate. It is smooth, it melts on the tongue, and is thus perceived as a sensuous pleasure. In fact, although there is no scientific proof to back up this thesis, chocolate continues to be considered an aphrodisiac. This myth is as old as is the history of chocolate and it is so pervasive, I suggest, because people want it to be true. It clearly adds to the fantastic dimension of chocolate indulgence. It also helps to strengthen the relation between chocolate and Blackness because the sexualization and racialization of chocolate correspond to the equally sexualized discourse on Black corporeality. Both chocolate and Blackness become a highly desired indulgence, and a sensuous pleasure – a construction clearly at work in some contemporary chocolate advertisements, as well as in erotic literature and blues music, for instance.

Chocolate is nourishing and considered to have an anti-depressant effect; it is given as a solace, a treat, a quick snack, or a gratification; it can come in artful and sophisticated wrappers, which underline its quality and its associations with foreign countries (often by depicting romanticized plantation scenes that are intended to represent the origin of the cocoa bean, as well as create the impression that the chocolate bar is not at all an industrialized product); it enters not only the body as nourishment, but also the mind as a stimulant. And yet, chocolate also possesses a sinful connotation; it is devilish because one can hardly resist its temptation, and consumed excessively it can even be unhealthy. As feminist Cat Cox poignantly observes in her book *Chocolate Unwrapped: The Politics of Pleasure*: “Whilst chocolate is a product which holds associations of sensuality and romance, it is also recognized as a food which makes you fat.”¹⁰ It expresses pleasure and vice, again the sweet and the bitter. Anthropologist Susan Terrio sums up: “On the one hand, it encompasses meanings of pleasure, strength, and celebration, as well as social bonds.... Consumed in moderation it is a sign for passion, love, even playful eroticism, and a constituent element of the social order. On the other hand, chocolate also connotes overindulgence, contamination, even illness, and is a symbol of sexual perversion, deceit, and class conflict.”¹¹

3.2 Chocolate as a Myth

The tempting characteristics one usually associates with the chocolate, truffles, hot chocolate, cookies, and chocolate bars that enrich one's diet, stand in stark contrast to individuals toiling on small, hidden plantations, in humid weather, and in precarious situations. It is therefore helpful to conceptualize chocolate as a myth, a concept I borrow from Roland Barthes. Mythologies participate in the making of our world, because they help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture. It is their function to naturalize the cultural, and thus to make dominant cultural and historical values and beliefs seem entirely “normal,” “natural,” and common sense. They appear to be objective and “true” reflections of “the way things are.”¹² Framed as a myth, chocolate can then be understood

10 C. Cox, *Chocolate Unwrapped* (footnote 5), p. 31.

11 S. J. Terrio, *Crafting the Culture* (footnote 7), p. 239.

12 In his essay *Bichon and the Blacks* Roland Barthes writes about “one of our major servitudes: the oppressive

as a depoliticized speech act, meaning that it turns the social and material history of chocolate (slavery, plantation economy, coercive labor practices) into a “natural” state of things; especially in advertisements, chocolate is stripped of its “historical fat,” thus the “dark side” of the history of chocolate is often silenced and hidden. And yet, the material conditions are not completely erased, but rather impoverished on the semantic space chocolate inhabits.

The friction between these modes of production and the symbolism chocolate possesses again illustrate why chocolate is a myth. The product has to be divorced from its material basis in order to make for an attractive and a successful signifier. According to cultural critic Sut Jhally, “the fetishism of commodities consists in the first place of emptying them of meaning, of hiding the real social relations objectified in them through human labour, to make it possible for the imaginary/symbolic social relations to be injected into the construction of meaning at a secondary level... The real is hidden by the imaginary.”¹³ Chocolate and its connection to Blackness and Black coercive labor exemplify the fetish power of commodities. In tune with Jhally, Fernando Coronil, who wrote the foreword for Fernando Ortiz’ classic study *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, notes that “... the appearance of commodities as independent entities – as potent agents in their own right – conceals their origins in conflictual relations of production and confirms a commonsense perception of these relations as natural and necessary.”¹⁴ Hence, there still is, of course, a historical context, namely the context in which the commodity is produced, but these material conditions are “emptied out” on the representational level. This “emptiness” is then filled with new, attractive meanings, so that cocoa and chocolate become both – myth and fetish.

As a result, what is presented to the viewer in advertisements is a world without contradictions, a fantasy of consumption in which the existence of People of Color is legitimized by their function to work for white consumers. And this world, a world of clear-cut boundaries between “natives” or “savages” and the “civilized world,” between rawness and refined materials, between Black and white, is not only pointed out, but literally imposed on the consumer.¹⁵ The consumers of chocolate not only exploit the lives and labor force of People of Color in the Global South to provide the Western world with affordable sweets, but they also exploit the magic chocolate has to offer, the mythical dimensions, i.e., that it is a sweet treat, a mood enhancer, an aphrodisiac, a nourishment for the body and the soul.¹⁶ Both, Jhally building on Karl Marx, and Barthes stress the fact that the real social relations – the historical realities – are hidden in order for the

divorce of knowledge and mythology,” see: Roland Barthes, Bichon and the Blacks, in: David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Anatomy of Racism*, Minneapolis (Mass.) 1999, pp. 127-129.

13 Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, New York 1987, p. 51.

14 Fernando Coronil, Introduction, in: Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Durham (N.C.) 2003, pp. ix-lvi, p. xxvii.

15 Barthes notes that “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.” See *ibid.*, p. 117.

16 See also: Michael Taussig, *Redeeming Indigo*, in: *Theory, Culture, Society*, 25 (2008) 1, pp. 1–15, p. 12.

imaginary, for the fantasy to work. In a lot of advertisements for cocoa and chocolate, the coerced labor, the oppression and exploitation of Africans and South Americans, is glossed over and romanticized by a tropical fantasy of a premodern world.

What is intriguing is that despite the fact that (obviously) coerced labor, slavery, and colonialism would not make for successful advertising tropes, it is especially this visual rhetoric of the plantation – directly drawing on the historical production process – that proves to be so enduring and attractive in advertising. Put differently, these selling strategies for chocolate were dependent on the “hidden history” of labor conditions on the plantations because otherwise, a wide array of images and connotations would simply not have been available and could not have been revalorized as a fantasy of consumption. The material conditions of the chocolate business, the precarious labor situation and its exploitative nature are not completely erased, but impoverished on the semantic space chocolate inhabits as a sweet treat. Apparently, the idea that Black subjects toil for the pleasurable consumption of a commodity was (and possibly continues to be) so appealing to (white) consumers that this imperial fantasy constituted a decisive element in the discourse on chocolate and its visual representations.

I will now draw on two radically different examples in order to illustrate my points: first, an international scandal brought about by the use of slave labor in Portuguese West Africa around 1900; secondly, selected usages of the chocolate signifier within American popular culture and by African Americans themselves. Looking at the history of cocoa and chocolate from such differing points of view will allow for the combination of what is generally treated as two completely different aspects, namely the material and the discursive dimensions of (signifying) chocolate in the Atlantic world.

4. Chocolate Fantasies and Plantation Realities

*How seldom do we think when we drink a cup of cocoa or eat some morsels of chocolate, that our liking of these delicacies has set minds and bodies at work all the world over!... To the black and the brown races, the negroes and the East Indians, we owe a debt for their work on tropical plantations, for the harder manual work would be too arduous for Europeans unused to the heat of those regions.*¹⁷

This quote by Arthur Knapp, an employee of the British Cadbury company who published a book on cocoa in 1920, illustrates that chocolate partly derives its exoticism and appeal from the knowledge of “tropical” places and peoples: the coercion of Black bodies and Black people’s labor that enable the pleasurable consumption. Indeed, the modes of harvesting cocoa have not always been a well-kept secret, and I shall argue that the fact

17 Arthur W. Knapp, *Cocoa and Chocolate: Their History from Plantation to Consumer*, London 1920, p. 17. Knapp’s study was supported by the Cadbury Brothers as he was a research chemist for the company. His book contains an extensive bibliography, comprising titles (in chronological order) in English, Spanish, French, and German from 1643 to 1919.

that cocoa is produced by People of Color, in places and through practices reminiscent of European colonialism might in fact induce the “tropical” and “exotic” appeal of the consumption of chocolate.

Other commentators were more astutely aware than Knapp of the contradictions underlying Europe’s appetite for colonial commodities with Enlightenment sentiments. In 1920, W. E. B. Du Bois, for instance, stated in his essay *The Souls of White Folk*:

*Rubber, ivory, and palm-oil; tea, coffee, and cocoa; bananas, oranges, and other fruit; cotton, gold, and copper – they, and hundred other things which dark and sweating bodies hand up to the white world from their pits of slime, pay and pay well, but of all that the world gets the black world gets only the pittance that the white world throws it disdainfully.*¹⁸

It was, in fact, mostly kidnapped and enslaved Africans who toiled in the fields of stolen land in South American, Caribbean, and later West African cocoa plantations, and these modes of production prevailed long after slavery was officially abolished. The colonial production, the trade and the metropolitan consumption fostered the strength of the European empires. Cocoa, like other colonial commodities, linked the colonies to the metropolises and further influenced the interactions of the actors in the Atlantic world. The commodities from the periphery changed the society, culture, and economy of the metropolis as decisively, though in different ways, as the periphery was changed by colonization. Commodity production in the colonies, and their processing and consumption in Europe, made enslaved Africans and laborers crucial to the history of the Atlantic.¹⁹

4.1 Cocoa in Portuguese West Africa

During transatlantic slavery, most of the cocoa consumed in Europe and North America came from plantations in South America and the West Indies, primarily the Amazon region, Jamaica, and Trinidad.²⁰ But this changed rapidly and dramatically in the late nineteenth century, when cocoa production’s center of gravity began to shift towards West Africa.²¹ *The Story of Chocolate*, a publication from 1967, explains this shift naïvely as follows: “It became more profitable to cultivate cacao trees in West Africa where there were still many people willing to work on cacao farms. Proper growing conditions, the demand for the cacao bean at low cost, and a good labor supply have helped to make West Africa the chief source of cacao beans.”²²

18 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of White Folks*, in: David R. Roediger (ed.), *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White*, New York 1998, p. 194.

19 Stuart B. Schwartz, Introduction, in: id. (ed.), *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680*, Chapel Hill (N.C.) 2004, pp. 1–26, p. 21.

20 Wolf Mueller, *Seltsame Frucht Kakao: Geschichte des Kakaos und der Schokolade*, Hamburg 1957, pp. 94–95, p. 173; Dauril Alden, *The Significance of Cacao Production in the Amazon Region during the Late Colonial Period: An Essay in Comparative Economic History*, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 120 (1976) 2, pp. 103–135, p. 103.

21 Patrice Mandeng, *Auswirkungen der deutschen Kolonialherrschaft in Kamerun*, Hamburg 1973, p. 70.

22 David P. Butts/Addison Earl Lee, *The Story of Chocolate*, Austin (Tex.) 1967, p. 47.

In the late sixteenth century, the Spaniards introduced the cocoa tree to Fernando Pó (now Bioko), an island close to São Tomé and Príncipe, off the West Coast of Africa in the Gulf of Guinea. From this Spanish island, it was taken to São Tomé and Príncipe in 1822 by an African individual named Tetteh Quarshie, and not by the Portuguese or the Spanish, as common “wisdom” often maintains.²³ Quarshie, who unfortunately did not leave a paper trail himself, was from the Gold Coast (since 1957 Ghana), and had been trained as a master-blacksmith at the Basel Missionaries workshop in Christianborg (close to the city centre of Accra). Now remembered and celebrated as the “Father of the cocoa industry in Ghana,” Quarshie was asked to travel to Fernando Pó to work as an artisan. Six years later, in 1876, he returned with five cocoa pods and thereby initiated the growth of a highly successful cocoa industry in Ghana.²⁴ By the 1920s, due to Quarshie’s pioneering spirit and small cocoa plantations run by African farmers, the Gold Coast became the largest cocoa bean exporter in the world.²⁵ Consequently, it not only overtook Caribbean and Latin American plantations, which were disease-ridden and could not meet the growing demand anymore, it was also a prestigious alternative for chocolate companies such as Cadbury who wanted to make sure that their beans were scandal- and slave-free and as a result refrained from buying cocoa in São Tomé and Príncipe.²⁶

23 Sophie and Michael Coe, likewise incorrectly, write that the Portuguese brought chocolate to São Tomé from Brazil in 1824, see S. D. Coe/M. D. Coe, *Die wahre Geschichte der Schokolade*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 242; and so does A. Menninger in *Genuss im kulturellen Wandel* (footnote 7), p. 233. A. Knapp, on the other hand, writes of a “native of the Gold Coast” who brought the beans with him from Fernando Pó; see A. Knapp, *Cocoa and Chocolate* (footnote 17), p. 18.

24 Benjamin Acquah, *Cocoa Development in West Africa: The Early Period with Particular Reference to Ghana*, Accra 1999, pp. 21–22; John A. West, *A Brief History and Botany of Cacao*, in: Nelson Foster (ed.), *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World*, Tucson 1993, pp. 105–122, here pp. 116–17; Allen M. Young, *The Chocolate Tree: A Natural History of Cacao*, Washington/London 1994, p. 40; C. Off, *Bitter Chocolate* (footnote 5), p. 96–97. Wolf Mueller also notes that Fernando Pó has played a crucial role because local Africans took the cocoa bean from there and introduced it to the West African mainland, where they established a vital cocoa business within five decades, notably in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Nigeria; see W. Mueller, *Seltsame Frucht Kakao* (footnote 20), pp. 176–77; see also: Andreas Eckert, *African Rural Entrepreneurs and Labor in the Cameroon Littoral*, in: *Journal of African History*, 40 (1999), pp. 109–126.

25 It should be noted that this “version” of how cocoa was introduced to the Gold Coast does not go unchallenged either. Although Tetteh Quarshie is practically a national hero in Ghana, a booklet by Michael A. Kwamena-Poh on the Basel Missionaries argues that it was in fact the missionaries who brought cocoa pods from Surinam to their settlement in the Gold Coast as early as 1858. According to this account, Quarshie has to be credited for successfully cultivating cocoa, but the introduction of the crop would not have been possible without the missionaries’ involvement, most of whom were Germans or from German-speaking Switzerland. See Michael A. Kwamena-Poh, *The Basel Mission and the Development of the Cocoa Industry in Ghana, 1858–1918*, Mamfe, Akuapem (Ghana) 2005. It seems that this booklet is largely based on the work of Polly Hill, *Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana*, Berlin, Hamburg, Münster 1998 [1963], see especially p. 171. For an in-depth historical analysis with an impressive array of archival sources on Ghana’s cocoa economy and the involvement of the Swiss, see: Andrea Franc, *Wie die Schweiz zur Schokolade kam: Der Kakaohandel der Basler Handelsgesellschaft mit der Kolonie Goldküste (1893–1960)*, Basel 2008.

26 C. Off, *Bitter Chocolate* (footnote 5), p. 97.

4.2 The São Tomé and Príncipe Slave Labor Scandal

But before the Gold Coast/Ghana became the most important supplier of cocoa in West Africa, São Tomé and Príncipe occupied this position and became well known not only for their cocoa, but also for their coerced labor practices on the plantations.²⁷ One of the best documented episodes in this intertwined history of slavery and chocolate after the official abolition of slavery are the working conditions on these small islands.²⁸ While cocoa is usually a peasant crop in West Africa (as in Ghana, for instance), the two volcanic islands became infamous for the existence of coerced labor on privately owned plantations during a brief but intense boom in the cocoa industry.²⁹ Both islands, which are approximately the size of Germany's capital Berlin, were transformed at the end of the nineteenth century into virtual cocoa factories and became the largest cocoa producer in the world.³⁰

Most of the plantations were owned by immigrant Portuguese or local Black Creoles, and worked by "perpetually indentured" laborers, which means that they were de facto enslaved. Between 1880 and 1908, some 70,000 humans were purchased, enslaved, and forcefully moved to the islands; they were bought in Angola, and came from various regions and countries, among them Central Africa, Dahomey (today's Benin), Gabon, and southwestern China.³¹ These slaves joined thousands of other laborers from Central Africa; and at the turn of the century, the population in São Tomé amounted to approximately 35,000, of whom 18,000 were men and women from Angola and the Congo Free State, 2,500 were Europeans, and 3,500 free Africans. There were also over 11,000 indigenous inhabitants on the island, who did not work on the plantations.³²

Those who managed to survive the strenuous and long passage through Angola, the main slave route, were sold as "contract laborers."³³ Over 50,000 short-term indentured labor-

27 For an older standard work on the issue, see: James Duffy, *A Question of Slavery: Labour Policies in Portuguese West Africa and British Protest, 1850–1920*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1967.

28 Príncipe is much smaller than São Tomé. Concerning population and export of cocoa at the turn of the century, the relation of the islands is one to ten.

29 William G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa Plantations and Coerced Labor in the Gulf of Guinea, 1870–1914*, in: Martin A. Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia*, Madison 1993, pp. 150–170, p. 150.

30 W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Struggles over Labour Conditions in the Plantations of São Tomé and Príncipe*, in: *Slavery and Abolition*, 14 (1993) 1, pp. 149–167, p. 149.

31 Kevin Grant, *A Civilized Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884–1926*, New York 2005, p. 115. On the laborers and where they came from, see also: William A. Cadbury, *Labour in Portuguese West Africa: Second Edition with an Added Chapter*, London 1910 [1909], pp. 30–31. Apparently, the Portuguese had hoped that Chinese "coolies" [sic!] would prove to be more resistant to the virulent African diseases and thus brought about 300 of these Chinese laborers to the islands in 1895. Few of them survived and the "experiment" was discontinued. See W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa Plantations* (footnote 29), p. 163.

32 K. Grant, *A Civilized Savagery* (footnote 31), p. 115.

33 Henry Wood Nevinson dedicated several chapters to the slave route (see for instance chapter six, "The worst part of the slave route," or chapter eight, "The Slave Route to the Coast") where he offered a detailed account of the route, of the agents involved, and of the practice of slavery on the mainland, accompanying his text with photographic evidence of the horrors of the passage and the human tolls it took; Henry Wood Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery: With an Introduction by Basil Davidson*, New York 1968 [1906].

ers, free and coerced, were also “imported” to the islands and stayed one to three years. These numbers illustrate that there was a constant need for new (preferably inexpensive) labor supply. On the one hand, this constant demand was due to the expansion of the cocoa production. On the other hand, it was a result of low birth rates and an extremely high mortality, which was in turn due to the occurrence of diseases such as malaria and sleeping sickness, as well as the brutally hot climate.³⁴ Commenting on the environmental conditions people had to face, the British journalist Henry Nevinson (1856–1941) describes his encounter with the local climate in his highly influential book, *A Modern Slavery* as follows: “After struggling for hours and finding no change in the swamp and no break in the trees, I gave up the hope of that rising ground, and worked back to the main river. When at last I emerged, sopping with sweat, black with slime, torn and bleeding from the thorns, I knew that I had seen the worst nature can do.”³⁵ It does not come as a surprise that Arthur Knapp conveys a much more favorable picture of the climate and life on the plantation. Although he starts by stating that “we” should be grateful to “the Africans” for their work because “we” would not be able to bear the heat, he later describes São Tomé and Príncipe as “lovely” and continues by writing: “A warm, lazy sea, the sea of the doldrums, sapphire or turquoise, or, in deep shaded pools, a radiant green, joyfully foams itself away against these fairy lands of tossing palm, dense vegetation, rushing cascades, and purple, precipitous peaks.”³⁶ He thus evokes an image that much more resembles a holiday resort on a “far-away tropical” island rather than the setting for cocoa farms, coerced labor, and abuse of the workforce in brutal heat. Although, generally speaking, most cocoa in the world from the 1850s onward was produced by “relatively free” labor – primarily under sharecropping systems³⁷ – it is a cynical fact that São Tomé became the world’s largest cocoa producer at the turn of the century precisely because of the notorious slave trade from Angola and a rigid slavery system on its plantations.

Portugal abolished the slave trade in 1823, and a decree of 1858 declared that slavery had to end within twenty years.³⁸ Yet, the official end of slavery in 1878 did not mean immediate freedom for the enslaved Africans. According to law, they had to work for their owner for an additional period of ten years without pay before they were legally free.³⁹ And after its official abolition, the slave trade continued to persist and even thrive on the African mainland. Henry Nevinson termed this “domestic slavery” or “tribal slavery,”

34 W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Struggles over Labour Conditions* (footnote 30), p. 14; K. Grant, *A Civilized Savagery* (footnote 31), p. 116; Even Cadbury admits the “excessive mortality on the islands,” see W. Cadbury, *Labour in Portuguese West Africa* (footnote 31), p. 93.

35 H. W. Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery* (footnote 33), p. 7; Nevinson’s work was highly praised by missionaries, one of the earliest group of people to advertise and review his book; see: The Book Table, in: *Congregationalist and Christian World*, 21 July 1906; see also a review which appeared in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society of New York*, 40 (1908) 9, p. 566–567.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

37 W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765–1914*, London 2000, p. 195.

38 Lowell Joseph Satre, *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics, and the Ethics of Business*, Athens (Ohio) 2005, p. 41.

39 W. Mueller, *Seltsame Frucht Kakao* (footnote 20), p. 174.

which occurred among different ethnic groups and was less harsh and more flexible in terms of the duration and conditions of servitude.⁴⁰ The Portuguese authorities knew about these conditions, but in order to cut costs that resulted from importing free labor from West Africa, they did not take action.⁴¹ The government in Portugal, which was hit by the global economic depression in 1873, had a strong interest in maintaining and even enlarging its income from the cocoa trade. The country's economic instability was one of the factors that led to the intensification of slavery on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.⁴²

Thus, in order to guarantee a persistent labor supply without increasing costs, planters from São Tomé and Príncipe relied heavily on this illegal enterprise and purchased slaves from Angolan traders. These traders obtained enslaved women and men from chiefs or rebel soldiers in exchange for guns, ammunition, and cloth.⁴³

Therefore, although slavery came to an end on the islands in the 1870s, it resurfaced later and figured prominently in the global cocoa economy. It was especially due to the growing demand for cocoa – for which lucrative markets developed from the 1880s on in Germany, Great Britain, the United States, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland – that slavery resumed in the early 1880s and continued to do so until long after the First World War.⁴⁴

After their long march along the “slave route” through Angola, the enslaved Africans, the migrants, and the “contract workers” were all shipped to the cocoa plantations, with some of them presumably knowing that their return to Angola was unlikely and that they had been sold into slavery. In fact, several missionaries, who were indispensable eye witnesses, observed that those who had been shipped to São Tomé did not return and were considered dead by their relatives.⁴⁵ Charles Albert Swan, a British missionary and a member of the Plymouth Brethren in Africa, recounted an incident in which a young woman threw herself overboard one night “rather than enter the unexperienced horrors of S. Thomé.”⁴⁶

Although the enslaved Africans were technically freed once they had been purchased and arrived on the plantations, they were forced to sign long contracts (usually for a five-year period), which were automatically renewed upon their expiration. As neither the content of the contract nor its regulations were translated or explained to them, most

40 H. W. Nevins, *A Modern Slavery* (footnote 33), p. 14.

41 W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate* (footnote 37), p. 221.

42 K. Grant, *A Civilized Savagery* (footnote 31), p. 114.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

44 W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Struggles over Labour Conditions* (footnote 30), p. 162; According to Anti-Slavery International, reports of forced labor even continued well into the 1950s, see: Anti-Slavery International (ed.), *The Cocoa Industry in West Africa: A History of Exploitation*, 2004, p. 3, http://www.antislavery.org/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/c/cocoa_report_2004.pdf (accessed on 1 September 2011); K. Grant, *A Civilized Savagery* (footnote 31), p. 114; L. J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial* (footnote 38), p. 44.

45 Charles A. Swan, *The Slavery of To-day: or, The Present Position of the Open Sore of Africa*, Glasgow 1909, pp. 29–31; L. J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial* (footnote 38), pp. 7–8, 47.

46 C. A. Swan, *The Slavery of To-day* (footnote 45), p. 27.

of the workers did not understand the terms to which they “agreed.”⁴⁷ One anonymous British missionary wrote in a letter to Swan: “So far as I understand, the paper (that is the contract) is simply a cloak to cover the evil practice, a ‘convenience’ for the white trader!”⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Nevinson characterized “contract labor” as a euphemism for “periodical slavery.”⁴⁹ In tune with Nevinson, the missionary Swan likewise termed “contract labor” a “kind of bandage,” with whose help the “open sore of Africa” is covered.⁵⁰ Echoing the work of Nevinson, Swan continues to describe the current slave trade and the horrendous passage through Angola. Stating that, indeed, the old slave markets no longer existed, and no overcrowded slave ship had been seen in a long time, the state of affairs could still best be characterized as slavery, yet in a “modern” fashion. Although the women and men on the plantations were relatively well treated, according to his assessment, they “have passed through untold suffering on their way to the Coast from the interior, and the terrible tale of agony endured by the very large percentage who die, or are killed because they cannot longer command sufficient strength to drag one foot in front of the other, will remain untold till the Great Judgment Day.”⁵¹

4.3 Representations of Work on Cocoa Plantations in Historical Advertising Cards

Even if this example of São Tomé is not representative of the majority of the cocoa production in the early twentieth century, it is remarkable that the sudden surge in the demand for chocolate in Western Europe and North America could only be satisfied by a vast increase in slave labor. This is even more noteworthy since the symbolism of chocolate predominantly created by a simultaneously nascent advertising industry and popularized through, for example, advertising cards, rather envisioned a tropical fantasy in which “exotic” produce was linked to People of Color in a peaceful, sometimes pastoral plantation setting.

The Black woman in the exemplary card reproduced here, dating roughly from between 1890 to 1910, dressed in spotless white, kneeling (seemingly) peacefully on the ground and collecting cocoa pods, reveals a dialectical relationship between “natives” and “Westerners,” since it is in fact this woman and other indigenous people who knew how to cultivate, harvest, and prepare cocoa – knowledge that mostly white people in North America and the so-called Old World valued and benefited from greatly.⁵²

47 Ibid., pp. 28–30; L. J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial* (footnote 38), pp. 7–8.

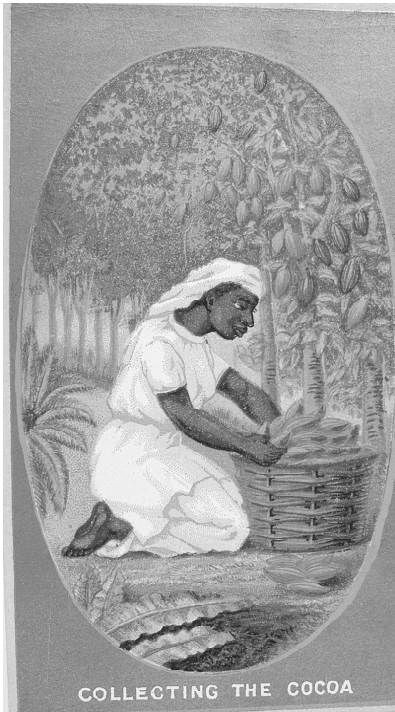
48 C. A. Swan, *The Slavery of To-day* (footnote 45), p. 30.

49 Basil Davidson, Introduction, in: H. W. Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery* (footnote 33), p. x. B. Davidson – also an investigative journalist and a historian of Africa, who was widely read and became quite well known as an “expert” on Africa through his writings – wrote an account of coerced labor in Angola for *Harper’s Magazine* as late as 1955 – fifty years after Nevinson’s accounts had been published in the same magazine. Davidson’s book *Black Mother: The Years of the African Slave Trade*, Boston 1961, was also a required reading on the Black Panther Party book list in 1968. People who wanted to join the BPP were asked to read all the books on that reading list.

50 C. A. Swan, *The Slavery of To-day* (footnote 45), p. 24.

51 Ibid., pp. 21–22.

52 T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, New York 1994, p. 147.



Collecting the Cocoa, n.d. (Source: Warshaw Collection of Business Americana – Cocoa and Chocolate, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

Through this image, consumers can infer what cultural historian Jackson Lears termed “imperial primitivism,” that white conquerors had entered foreign, tropical lands, had extracted mysterious remedies and foods from the local population, whom they had made to work for them.⁵³ Apart from that, the image promises pleasure to the consumer; pleasure in consuming tropical riches such as cocoa, and pleasure from exploring a foreign, “exotic” world. According to cultural critic bell hooks, “the point is to be changed by this convergence of pleasure and Otherness. One dares – acts – on the assumption that the exploration into the world of difference, into the body of the Other, will provide a greater, more intense, pleasure than any that exists in the ordinary world of one’s familiar racial group.”⁵⁴ And, referring to the symbolic capital and appeal of Blackness and Black bodies, Paul Gilroy adds: “Blackness, which for so long had been entirely worthless, could be recognized as becoming endowed with symbolic value that nobody appears to have anticipated. Needless to say, new forms of racism emerged with these

53 Ibid., p. 146.

54 bell hooks, *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance*, in: id., *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston 1992, pp. 21-40, p. 24. On the process of “Othering” see also, for example: Homi Bhabha, *The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse*, in: Joanne Morra/Marquard Smith (eds.), *Histories, Archaeologies and Genealogies of Visual Culture*, London 2006, pp. 248-266.

big developments.”⁵⁵ Through a system of relations, namely associating chocolate with a Woman of Color in a tropical setting, a redefinition of chocolate is achieved. It is not an industrial product, but becomes a pleasure commodity, connected to the riches of nature, to exoticism, to recreation from everyday life and the constraints of civilization. Eating chocolate could thus carry the consumer away to a tropical fantasy, a space full of riches, peaceful and abundant.

On another level, the notion of primitivism is qualified by a different, possible reading of the image. The woman in the picture can hardly be described as “primitive” herself because she is dressed in a white gown that communicates purity. She kneels in what evokes an image of the Garden of Eden, reaping the fruits of the tree. She seems to have entered a holy union with nature, being purified through the act of gathering the fruits the garden has to offer. This scenery can be characterized as pastoral insofar as it is free of the constraints of modernity and civilization; it implicitly suggests that those who indulge in chocolate can step outside of civilization and “return” to a place of harmony with nature. Literary scholar Lawrence Buell has defined “pastoral” as a remythification of the natural environment. According to his assessment, it has become synonymous with “the idea of (re)turn to a less urbanized, more ‘natural’ state of existence,” a contradistinction to society, urbanization, and industrialization.⁵⁶ This fantasy is offered by the manufacturers of chocolate who apparently succeeded in settling the harvesting of cocoa and production of chocolate outside of civilization (or so they would like to suggest through such imagery). Thus, with the help of such visuals, the consumption of chocolate is remetaphorized as an exotic, tropical, liberating experience, which promises intense feelings, fantasy, and the fulfillment of utopian longings. Of course, what is silenced and erased in such an “imperial cast of American pastoral ideology” is the fact that Black subjects were usually excluded from any pastoral gratification.⁵⁷

Moreover, what is equally interesting is that the card is painted in warm, natural colors; the colors of the cocoa pods and the landscape correspond with the skin color of the woman, thus also enforcing a visual connection between cocoa and chocolate with People of Color. Clearly though, chocolate’s association with Blackness is not predominantly based on a vague similarity of the skin color of some Black people with the color of an edible product, but on the Western imagination of dark-skinned people, tropical places, and practices that produce chocolate.

The image discussed above does not mediate, however, coerced labor practices and slavery happening in São Tomé and Príncipe and other South American and African countries, but a woman who, in a serene setting, collects cocoa for the consumers in the Western World – who, according to other sources discussed above, would not be physically equipped to handle the hot climate. The ad not only recapitulates the idea of imperialism

55 P. Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2010, p. 9.

56 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1996, pp. 31, 33.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 42.

as a moral and material progress and hide the exploitative realities, but also evokes notions of pastoralism and a moderate, one could say, tamed primitivism.

Yet, the material conditions of the cocoa business, the precarious labor situation and its exploitative nature cannot be completely erased, as knowledge of slave labor on cocoa plantations exists and the plantation context is referred to in the trade card. But these material conditions are impoverished on the semantic space chocolate inhabits. They are also silenced in the usage of chocolate as a racial signifier, which is the final aspect of this article.

5. Chocolate as a (Self-Affirmative) Racial Signifier for Blackness

Maybe the best known associations of chocolate and Blackness, especially in the German cultural context, are negative ones: racist stereotypes such as the infamous German advertising icon Sarotti Mohr, or chocolate as a metaphoric reference to Black people in everyday (racist) parlance.

What is less known, however, and what I would like to focus on here is the emancipatory potential of this signifier in the United States: its affirmative usage in order to create and offer an attractive and desirable Black identity. Apparently, this encoding was never only an imposition on African American peoples, but could on the contrary serve as a self-confident identification with Blackness: “Because Black people are not uniform in their physical appearances, many words – or labels – are used by Blacks to describe the various skin colors of Blacks. Over the years, Black people have generated a ‘vocabulary of pigmentation’ to describe all of the skin hues in their population.”⁵⁸

Especially during the second half of the twentieth century, chocolate was redeployed and remetaphorized by some African American individuals, and this new self-conception was deeply anchored in the discourses of the so-called New Negro Movement as well as the Black Power Movement. Examples for an affirmative usage by African Americans are the Broadway show “The Chocolate Dandies” (which premiered with Josephine Baker in 1924), as well as the dance troupes “The Chocolate Kiddies,” and the “Hot Chocolates.” “Harlem Sweeties,” a poem by Langston Hughes, also ties the chocolate signifier to Blackness. Reflecting on and celebrating the diversity and beauty of Black women’s skin shades, he rhapsodizes: “Peach-skinned girlie, coffee and cream, chocolate darling, out of a dream. Walnut tinted, or cocoa brown, pomegranate-lipped, pride of the town. Rich cream-colored, to plum-tinted black, feminine sweetness, in Harlem’s no lack.” Here, the chocolate metaphor is, among a plethora of other signifiers, used in a clearly eroticized fashion and in a reaffirming and celebratory way to construct Black women as desirable and sensual. It speaks to the internal differentiation of skin tones, as well as to the refusal of being perceived as “homogeneously Black.”

58 Kenneth R. Johnson, Words used for Skin Color in the Black Culture, in: *The Florida Reporter* (Spring/Fall 1973), p. 44.

5.1 Chocolate Cities: New Orleans and Washington, D.C.

This redeployment of the term continued after the Second World War and entered the realm of popular music and Blaxploitation movies, Black erotic literature, so-called ghetto literature, and eventually culminated in the powerful expression “Chocolate City,” which was used in reference to cities with a majority African American population. The popularization of that expression and the connotations that it carried with it made it increasingly inappropriate for whites to use. The resignification worked successfully against a possibly derogatory usage of the term by Euro Americans, and it became a term “for Blacks by Blacks” (which is not to say that it was/is a term embraced by all or even most African Americans).

In 2006, the mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, explicitly alluded to this emancipatory gesture within African American identity constructions, when he made the following comment as a response to hurricane Katrina: “New Orleans was a chocolate city before Katrina. This city will be chocolate at the end of the day. It’s the way God wants it to be.”⁵⁹ The view of New Orleans before Katrina as a “Chocolate City” expresses an alternative plan to the destruction the hurricane had brought. While this natural disaster destroyed the urban culture of New Orleans, “Chocolate City” claims an African American hegemony over that city’s culture. This claim is corroborated by the reference to God, endowing the aspired Black hegemony with a divine legitimation. “Chocolate City” is the myth that captures this claim. Interestingly enough, Nagin’s reference to the deity was less cause for irritation. Not only white middle-class residents, but members of the Black community, as well as the national mainstream media chose to focus their criticism and attention to Nagin’s wish for a “Chocolate City” and accused him of racism.

Nagin’s coining New Orleans a “Chocolate City” evoked the image of Washington, D.C., to which this expression originally referred in the early 1970s. Here, it proudly declared the city’s majority Black status and its prominence in the Black cultural scene. Disc jockeys of a Black-operated radio station popularized the term as a means to express “D.C.’s classy funk and confident Blackness.”⁶⁰ At the Human Kindness Day Concert on the Mall in Washington, D.C. in May 1975, where Stevie Wonder and many others performed, a huge banner above the stage read “Chocolate City.”⁶¹ It was a bold declaration of the fact that Washington constituted of a majority population of African Americans

59 Nagin apologizes for ‘chocolate’ city comments, 18 January 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/01/17/nagin.city/> (accessed on 1 September 2011).

60 Kenneth Carroll, *The Meanings of Funk*, Special to the Washington Post, 1 February 1998 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/longterm/library/dc/dc6898/funk.htm> (accessed on 1 September 2011); Courtland Milloy, *WOL*, in: *The Washington Post*, 2 December 1979, p. C1; Don Shirley, *In Search of Local Honor*, in: *The Washington Post*, 4 August 1973, p. D2. Subsequently, Chicago, Detroit and Harlem (N.Y.) were likewise referred to as “Chocolate Cities.”

61 The Human Kindness Day was a yearly concert on the Mall, organized by the National Park Service and local non-profit organizations, which took place from 1970 to 1975. Due to an increase of violent incidents as a result of ever bigger crowds, the event was eventually discontinued. See William Raspberry, *The Violence at ‘Human Kindness Day’*, in: *The Washington Post*, 14 May 1975, p. A19; Douglas B. Feaver/Alice Bonner, *Scattered Acts of Violence Mar Human Kindness Day Celebration*, in: *The Washington Post*, 11 May 1975, p. 1.

in the wake of the white flight to the suburbs. Alluding to that attitude, the funk band Parliament titled its 1975 album “Chocolate City.” In the title track, bandleader George Clinton, backed up by that group’s signature funk sound, proclaimed: “There’s a lot of chocolate cities around. We’ve got Newark, we’ve got Gary. Somebody told me we’ve got L.A. And we’re working on Atlanta. But you’re the capital, CC” (CC meaning “Chocolate City”). He thus construes Black urbanization as a takeover and the Black ghetto as a space of resistance and defiance in a hostile society.⁶² Moreover, the song “Chocolate City” played with the fact that African Americans had gained some level of economic independence, had established a visible middle class population, and were in political control of Washington, the nation’s capital.

The cover of that album, colored in various shades of brown, shows three of the capital’s most well-known national symbols, namely the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Capitol, covered in dark liquid chocolate. In my view, several readings of the image are possible. The fact that the Washington Monument, a prime example of a phallic object, literally ejaculates chocolate can be interpreted as a reference to the image of the hyper-masculine, virile Black man, which dominated the Blaxploitation movies at the time, as well as views on Black masculinity within the Black Power movement. Thus, depending on the perspective of the viewer, the Parliament cover could have been regarded as threatening by non-Blacks, as too bold a declaration of Black pride, and as an image that shows the “Black takeover” of the nation’s capital. The positioning of the Lincoln Memorial in this image is noteworthy, too. Not only was Abraham Lincoln extremely popular among African Americans and has often been called the “Black man’s president” for signing the Emancipation Proclamation (officially “freeing the slaves,” who had already begun to emancipate themselves in significant numbers),⁶³ he was also accused by pro-slavery Democrats of advocating and promoting what they called “miscegenation.”⁶⁴

In any case, the cover can be interpreted as a demand for African Americans to enter not only the local, but the national political scene. In fact, the song opens with Clinton (prophetically!) stating that “They still call it the White House, but that’s a temporary condition, too.”

6. Conclusion

This essay on the history of chocolate has attempted to show that cocoa was not just an important commodity in the circum-Atlantic world but also a racial and political signifier. The powerful imagery of chocolate, making reference to a plantation context

62 Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, Berkeley (Calif.) 2004, p. 5.

63 See also: Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the USA*, in: *New Left Review*, 181 (1990), pp. 95–118.

64 See especially chapter five of Elise Virginia Lemire, *‘Miscegenation’: Making race in America*, Philadelphia (Pa.) 2002, for a discussion of the discourse on “miscegenation” after Emancipation as well as Lincoln’s position.

as well as to People of Color, has been used both to foster racial stereotypes and to create an attractive and popular identity for African Americans. Such an expanded history of cocoa and chocolate does not limit itself to the (forceful) movement of humans and commodities, but also integrates the transfer of ideas and discourses. The semantics of chocolate have emancipated themselves to a certain degree from their immediate material conditions and have thus cleared the way for the creation of a counter-discourse that allows for a self-affirmative identity formation and a positive self-identification with Blackness in the U.S. discourse on race.