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Hans Barth

**Professor Louis Agassiz, MD, PhD:
My Racism is a Humanism.
A lecture.**

14 **I would like to thank**

15 the artist *Sasha Huber*, who asked me for a piece on Agassiz, and
16 the historian *Hans Fässler*, who provided me with intelligent
17 comments on my text.
18

19 **Louis Agassiz**

20 lived from 1807 to 1873, first in Switzerland, and then, from 1846
21 onwards, in the USA.
22

23 In the European phase of his work he made a name for himself as an
24 ichthyologist and as a propagandist of the ice-age theory. In the USA he
25 was a prominent scientific organiser and founder of museums, as well as
26 being a gifted teacher and speaker.
27

28 He stubbornly advocated theories that had already proved fallacious in his
29 day and age. For example the opinion that God created all life
30 (creationism), that catastrophes had already eradicated all life on earth
31 several times before (catastrophism) and that God had newly-created every
32 single living species in an individual act of creation (successive
33 creationism). In this, God was supposed to have created human races
34 separately from each other (polygenism), and in an immutable ranking at
35 that, with the Blacks at the very bottom and his own race, the White one, at
36 the top (scientific racism).
37

38 He disseminated his racist positions in books, periodicals, lectures, talks
39 and as a government adviser. He recommended racial segregation, ethnic
40 cleansing, Apartheid and state measures to prevent half-breeds from being
41 born. These measures were considered to be crimes against humanity by
42 many people in his day and age too.
43

44 In his time Louis Agassiz was heavily criticised as a racist, both in Europe
45 as well as in the USA. From 1960 onwards, numerous investigations were
46 published, particularly in the USA, analysing his racism and his fallacious
47 scientific theories.
48

49 In Switzerland, his home country, Louis Agassiz' racist schemes were
50 wilfully and systematically kept secret until 2005.
51

52 **The author.**

53 Hans Barth, born in 1947, studied philosophy, Romance philology and
54 biology.

55 Since 2008 he has repeatedly spoken out on Louis Agassiz, in statements,
56 submissions, translations and essays. In 2012 he was a member of the
57 exhibition team in Grindelwald: "Gletscherforscher, Rassist: Louis Agassiz
58 (1807-2012)" [Glaciologist, Racist: Louis Agassiz (1807-2012)].

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64	Hans Barth:	
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66	Prof. Louis Agassiz, MD. PhD : My Racism is a Humanism.	
67	A lecture.	
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69		
70		
71	Content	
72		
73	Introduction: "In the name of God Almighty!"	4
74		
75	Part 1: My Swiss Opponents.	5
76		
77	Part 2: Slavery.	6
78		
79	Part 3: The Free Negro.	8
80		
81	Part 4: The Origin of the Races.	8
82		
83	Part 5: The Hierarchy of Races.	9
84		
85	Part 6: Miscegenation.	10
86		
87	Vote of thanks: To my "Friends".	11
88		
89		

90
91 Honourable ladies and gentlemen,
92
93 You will be asking yourselves why someone who died in the USA in 1873 would want to
94 interrupt his rest – which was planned to be eternal, after all – after 140 years, in order to give a
95 lecture in Scotland. Your question is perfectly legitimate, but to begin with:

96 **Introduction: "In the name of God Almighty!"**

97 [SOLEMNLY, MOVED] Please stand for a moment. I was in the habit of commencing my
98 lectures with a prayer and would today also like to start with God Almighty. Let us pray in
99 silence. (INTERLUDE, EMBARRASSINGLY LONG.) Thank you.

100
101 You will find me deeply moved to be standing here in Edinburgh again. Deeply moved like on
102 that 27th of October 1840, when – not far from here – Charles McLaren, editor of *The Scotsman*,
103 pointed out a cliff to me, whereupon I exclaimed, "That is the work of ice!" I know that people in
104 Edinburgh remember me well, me and my "Agassiz Rock".

105
106 However somebody was not all too pleased with my visit then: my special friend Charles
107 Darwin. Well, let's face it: Darwin was English. He could not understand Scotland. A year before
108 my visit, he declared the famous "Parallel Roads" in magnificent Glen Roy to be of ... marine
109 origin. Nonsense, they were the result of glacial movement.

110
111 Almost twenty years later, in 1859, things got really serious. Darwin came along with his theory
112 of evolution, and I stayed firm: nature is God's work. I suppose that's what you would call
113 "creationism" today.

114
115 Oh, and then there was something else. The race question.

116
117 Races did exist. Completely different ones. Races have existed since time immemorial. So they
118 had to have been created separately. And, quite obviously, they were not equal. I guess you
119 would call that "racism" today.

120
121 Darwin, however, wanted to squeeze the races into his idea of evolution, too: according to him
122 races had developed apart, from one common origin, they were, so he thought, somehow equal.

123
124 People have forgiven me my creationism, but not my racism. Creationism is commonly regarded
125 as human, racism as inhuman.

126
127 Is my racism inhuman? Is it really? No, it is not. Please allow me to furnish my last piece of
128 evidence: My racism is a humanism!

129
130 I should like to begin with my home country, Switzerland, and this never-ending Swiss campaign
131 against me and my racial theories.

132

133 **Part 1: My Swiss Opponents.**

134 My work has always been appreciated in Switzerland and my memory held in high esteem. Until
135 recently. [ANNOYED, CONTEMPTUOUS] Then, in 2005, the accusations started, from a so-
136 called historian, a socialist from St. Gallen.

137
138 [OUTRAGED] Together with others he demanded, in 2007, that I should be deprived of the
139 name of my mountain, the Agassizhorn. The mountain should be re-named after one Renty, a
140 slave, who was photographed, on my orders, for scientific purposes.

141 Ah, the Agassizhorn! My friends named the mountain after me in 1840. Oh, by the way, an artist
142 is supposed to have reached the top of the mountain, in a helicopter, in order to symbolically re-
143 christen it Rentyhorn! An artist of mixed race, by the way.

144
145 And then the Swiss government itself attacked me. That went like this:

146
147 Louis Agassiz "*held [...] racist views which went far beyond the usual racist interpretation*
148 *paradigm of the time. There is no doubt that the government of today condemns his racist*
149 *thought.*"

150
151 Before I say anything on the accusations themselves, however, a few words on the Swiss
152 government. [ANGRY] No, not on this one here, but on mine.

153
154 In my time the government adjudged the situation completely differently:

155
156 In 1864 the government of the time was asked to state its position, too. Again by a socialist,
157 Member of Parliament Joos from Schaffhausen. He wanted the government to take a stand
158 against Swiss people in Brazil who had slaves working for them. And what did the government
159 say in 1864? Precisely this:

160
161 For Swiss **master tradesmen** in Brazil it was "*the most advantageous thing, to buy Negro boys*
162 *and to teach them a trade*". For: "*Free, trained workers are very rare and command*
163 *extraordinarily high pay.*"

164
165 More generally the government held that, whoever wanted to forbid Swiss people in Brazil from
166 owning slaves could "*use the same right, or rather injustice, to decree that Swiss factory owners*
167 *have to dismiss their workers, if a socialist had the idea of having parliament declare that the*
168 *relationship between a factory worker and a factory boss was one that would debase*
169 *Switzerland's name.*"

170 Swiss factory workers and slaves were both equally essential. "*As little as the factory owner can*
171 *continue to run his establishment without workers, as little can the fazendeiro in Brazil currently*
172 *cultivate his lands without slaves.*"

173 Slavery, the government said, was "*an act that does not involve a crime*". And above all: without
174 slavery, according to the government, life for Swiss people in Brazil would become horrible:
175 "*In this case, however, the Swiss merchants could stand in the kitchen and carry out the rest of*
176 *the servants' work themselves.*"

177

178 [BOASTFULLY] That's what the Swiss government of my time said, in 1864!

179
180 I, in contrast, wrote to my mother a few weeks after I arrived in the USA, on the 2nd of
181 December 1846.

182
183 "*Slavery's defenders have forgotten that these people, even if they are black, have the same right*
184 *as we do to enjoy their freedom, and they see in this question only a question of ownership, of a*
185 *legally guaranteed inheritance, the loss of which would be their ruin.*"

186
187 [OUTRAGED] Can anyone voice their opinion against slavery more clearly? Pardon? Yes, of
188 course, it was a **private** letter and nobody in the USA got to know about it. [DESPERATE,
189 CHILDISH] So what!?! Should I have made myself unpopular in my new country??

190
191 [REPROACHFULLY] They want to condemn Louis Agassiz as a horrible racist and thus remove
192 the true criminals, the defenders of slavery in Swiss governmental positions, from the spotlight.
193 That's ... politics.

194 **Part 2: Slavery.**

195 So let me proceed to the second part of my elaborations, on the subject of slavery. [IRONIC,
196 SNEERING] No, no, this isn't about how your pretty little iPhones are made, or your equally
197 pretty computers. Nor am I going to talk about the cheap clothes, which you buy from H&M or
198 C&A. The inexpensive material comes from their suppliers' factories in Pakistan or Bangladesh.
199 Manufactured by slaves who occasionally burn to death in these factories, because they're locked
200 in. Not even the slaves in the American South were locked in. Nor am I going to talk about where
201 all the cheap raw materials come from that enable you to live your life as if you lived in the
202 master's mansion on a plantation in the American South. No, I don't want to upset you with all
203 the sex slaves either, whose renewed arrival is advertised day after day in your newspapers. I'm
204 not going to talk about any of all that here, naturally.

205
206 Nor am I going to talk about the fact that Scotland, and particularly Glasgow and Edinburgh,
207 became immensely rich through slave-produced tobacco and sugar.

208
209 Let us address the criticism directed at me, Louis Agassiz.

210
211 [BORED, MONOTONOUSLY] I am supposed to have been disgusted by Negroes; supposed to
212 have studied them on slave plantations; supposed to have had them photographed naked and used
213 these photos in public talks to prove the inferiority of the Negroes; supposed to have equated the
214 intelligence of Negroes with that of white foetuses; supposed to have supported proponents of
215 slavery by contributing to their books and thus enhancing them; supposed to have hated half-
216 breeds and called for their state-organised disappearance; supposed to have held the women
217 themselves responsible for sexual violence against slaves; supposed to have called for strict racial
218 segregation; supposed to have denied the common origin of all people and have taught that all
219 races were created separately; supposed to have called for the deportation of all Blacks back to

220 Africa. In short, I am supposed to have participated in various crimes against humanity: slavery,
221 Apartheid, ethnic cleansing, genocide, racism.

222
223 [LOSING HIS TEMPER] What my opponents accuse me of with every charge is simply this:
224 that as a scientist I told the truth, and nothing but the truth, on every point! That makes them
225 extremely angry.

226
227 [SERIOUS, CONFSSIONAL] Certainly, I'm not only a scientist, I'm also a Christian. **The duty**
228 **to tell the truth AND the requirement to love thy neighbour!** When I arrived in the USA in
229 1846 and saw Negro slaves for the first time in Philadelphia, I was torn apart inside by the sight
230 of them. I then wrote to my mother Rose in Switzerland, God bless her:

231
232 *"I hardly dare describe to you the painful impression they made on me, so strongly does the*
233 *feeling that they evoked in me contradict all our ideas of the joint brotherhood of the human race*
234 *and the joint origin of our species. But the truth above all. As much as I felt pity at the sight of*
235 *this degraded and degenerated race, as much did their lot awaken my compassion at the thought*
236 *that they are really humans; and it is equally impossible for me to suppress the feeling that they*
237 *aren't of the same blood as we are."*

238
239 And then I wrote:

240
241 [DISGUSTED] *"When I saw their black faces with their fat lips and their grinning teeth, the*
242 *wool on their heads, their bent knees, their long hands, their large bent nails, and in particular*
243 *the paleness of the palms of their hands, I simply couldn't take my eyes off their faces, as if to tell*
244 *them to keep their distance, and when this nauseating hand moved close to my plate to serve me,*
245 *I wished that I could get away from here, in order to eat a piece of bread sitting away from them*
246 *rather than eating with such attendants."*

247
248 [LOSING HIS TEMPER] What disgusted me was that they weren't **real** Negroes. There were
249 only very few of them in the USA, strictly speaking none at all. What I saw and described with
250 such disgust were **enslaved** Negroes. In the previous sentence I had named them precisely and
251 spoken of *"this degraded and degenerated race"* – *"cette race dégradée et dégénérée"*. They were
252 deformed Negroes. Degenerated. **By what?** By slavery. The real Negro in Africa isn't disgusting.
253 Impossible for me to consider disgusting something that God himself has created. Otherwise I
254 would have to consider God disgusting, and I daren't imagine that.

255
256 So was I an abolitionist? No. I wrote to my mother in Switzerland at the time:

257
258 *"The philanthropists, who want to admit them [the Negroes] into their community as citizens,*
259 *continually forget that, by giving them their political rights, they can neither give them the*
260 *African sun, which is necessary to promote their full development, nor a home amongst them [the*
261 *Whites], for they would refuse them their daughters, should they ask for them, and not one of*
262 *them would entertain the thought of marrying a Negress."*

263

264 The abolitionists were hypocritical. I knew that the Negroes, once they were released from
265 slavery, would continue to be exploited. History has proved me right, as you know.

266
267 Which brings us to:

268 **Part 3: The Free Negro.**

269 [COMMITTED] That's why I suggested that they be given true freedom, that they be released to
270 return to their own continent, to Africa. Or at least allow them to establish their own Africa in the
271 American South. That was later condemned as Apartheid, a crime against humanity.

272
273 I knew the greed of these Whites and campaigned for the Negroes and in 1863 I warned the US
274 government of the exploitation of the Negroes that would set in after the abolition of slavery:

275
276 *“How to prevent the whites from securing the lion’s share of the labor of the blacks? This is a*
277 *question which my want of familiarity with the operations of the laboring classes prevents me from*
278 *answering in a manner satisfactory to myself. Is it not possible to apply to the working Negroes*
279 *something like the system which regulates the duties of the foreman in all our manufacturing*
280 *establishments?”*

281
282 See, this is one way in which efforts to protect Blacks from exploitation by Whites can be turned
283 into a crime in the eyes of the world.

284
285 But let's get back to the Negroes. I said: I couldn't help the Negroes. What I was able to do was to
286 find out the truth about them. Which leads me to

287 **Part 4: The Origin of the Races.**

288 [LECTURING, AND JUSTIFYING HIS ACTIONS] Whoever wanted to say anything about
289 Negroes, scientifically, had to make the effort of studying Negroes. Namely there where they
290 lived: on the plantations.

291
292 Every Negro that I saw, on the plantations, in the streets, in houses, should I have freed him?
293 Would I have been able to do that? Of course not.

294
295 Should I have condemned slavery publicly, as my critics have demanded? Perhaps. But the end of
296 slavery didn't free the Blacks, but rather created new dependencies for them and frequently
297 brought them greater misery. The real solution, the repatriation of the Blacks to Africa or settling
298 them as free people in their own territories in the USA, this solution wasn't available. So I kept
299 my peace. And I didn't have the aptitude, nor the calling, to transform myself from a scientist into
300 a politician.

301
302 And then there are the photos, which have been turned into an accusation against me. Normal
303 scientific documentation. Negroes are scientifically valuable. Negroes are biologically different

304 from Whites, different pelvis structure, different arm length, different breasts, different skull
305 form, different proportions. That was what the photos were needed for.

306
307 [FANATICAL AND MEGALOMANIACAL] My opponents are horrified that a Negro should
308 have to show his body. It wasn't about this or that Negro. It was about questions concerning the
309 human race. It was about the big scientific question: Do all races have the same origin, or did the
310 human race arise in different places at different times? Behind this was the question: Who is the
311 Creator? Nature or God? And behind that the question: Who's telling the truth? The Bible or
312 science?

313
314 I stuck to God the Creator and taught that there had been separate acts of creation for Whites and
315 Blacks, it's called creationist polygenism. My friend, the poet Longfellow, put it in the following
316 humorous way: Agassiz "*thinks there were several Adams and Eves.*" That was made into an
317 accusation against me. Creationism was said to be unscientific and polygenism was said to be
318 racist.

319
320 [DOGMATICALLY] The opposite is the case: Polygenism is a theory which doesn't propose an
321 adventurous solution, which reconciles the authority of the Bible with the freedom of science and
322 which recognises every living being in its individuality and originality: Whites right at the top
323 and Blacks at the bottom, I'm afraid.

324 **Part 5: The Hierarchy of Races.**

325 There are hierarchies everywhere where there is life.

326
327 [STUBBORNLY] Indeed, I myself have affirmed this hierarchy and written:

328
329 *"[...] there are upon earth different races of men, inhabiting different parts of its surface,*
330 *which have different physical characters; and this fact [...] presses upon us the obligation*
331 *to settle the relative rank among these races, the relative value of the characters peculiar*
332 *to each [...]"*.

333
334 [CONDESCENDINGLY] Simply compare 2,000 years of civilisation of Whites and Blacks,
335 then you'll see a high standard of civilisation for Whites, and for Negroes you'll see precisely that
336 hullabaloo that you can observe in Africa.

337
338 Surprisingly enough, there were a few scatterbrains in my day too who preached equality and the
339 equal rights of the White race with the Negro and Indian races. How can one explain this
340 blindness?

341
342 [HIGHLY EXCITED, BLINDLY DEFENSIVE] I voiced my opinion on that, too. The answer
343 is: ideology. In this case the socialist ideology of equality.

344
345 The entire history of the colonisation of North America by Whites, you see, is based precisely on
346 this foundation: that the Indians and the Negroes are subordinate to the Whites. If the Indians

347 were equal to the Whites, then the colonisation of North America, that is to say the forced
348 displacement of indigenous Indians, would be a gigantic crime. The white Americans' economic
349 boom and assets are completely inconceivable without the strict subordination of the Negro race
350 under the Whites. If Negroes and Whites were equal, well, then the USA would also be an
351 atrocious gang of criminals on this point. Who, for God's sake, can think up such madness?

352
353 [SUDDENLY COOL, FACTUALLY DISTANCED] I myself have, by the way, always spoken
354 out purely scientifically. I never focused on politics, always only on biology.

355 **Part 6: Miscegenation.**

356 [LECTURING] Ladies and gentlemen, let us now address the question of miscegenation. This is
357 where the greatest accusations are levelled at me. I have described miscegenation as an evil and
358 called on the government to ensure that there aren't any more half-breeds.

359
360 [BORED] Yes, I have claimed that miscegenation was biologically unnatural; that race was a
361 question of blood; that miscegenation had disastrous biological consequences; that half-breeds
362 were racially inferior; that miscegenation caused socio-political catastrophes, for example in
363 Brazil; that the race problem was one reason for the downfall of entire cultures and states; that
364 miscegenation was a sin against the Creator and that the state had racial duties.

365
366 I have been accused of having been quoted by the Nazis on these matters. So if Nazis find some
367 truth in my writings, does that make these writings wrong?

368
369 [FACTUAL] But let's get to the point. Allow me to quote my own words:

370
371 *"[...] the idea of amalgamation is most repugnant to my feelings."*

372
373 Why? The simple fact that there are different races shows that this difference was God's will.
374 Otherwise he could have created half-breeds from the start. Miscegenation seeks to give God a
375 remedial class. One makes God an idiot, who forgot something important: the half-breeds! No,
376 Negroes are God's creation, same as Whites. Let's not interfere with God's Creation!

377
378 Miscegenation is a marginal problem, by the way, which only appears under perverse
379 circumstances. Slavery is one such perversion and promptly we have miscegenation.
380 Miscegenation is as perverse as its precondition, slavery.

381
382 At that time I wrote:

383
384 *"As soon as the sexual desires are awaking in the young men of the South, they find it easy*
385 *to gratify them by the readiness with which they are met by colored house servants."*

386
387 [TITILLATING, WINKING] Yes, naturally. The sexual abstinence until marriage that was asked
388 of young whites was difficult to bear. Now there are young Mulattas around. They have
389 completely different sexual morals. They do it like animals. And on top of this: Of course they

390 expect to gain an advantage if they do it with young Whites. They can't resist. The result: half-
391 breeds.

392
393 Allow me to close with a

394 **Vote of thanks: To my "Friends".**

395 [TWO-TONGUED, IRONIC] In closing I'd like to cordially thank all my false friends in
396 Switzerland, from museums and universities, from the media and publishers, from politics and
397 the sciences.

398
399 [ACCUSATORY, BORED] First of all there is the city of Neuchâtel. In 2010 it published a
400 great book on its history, with many colourful pictures. It was written by the city's historian,
401 Jelmini. And he also dedicated a chapter to me, but didn't mention my racial theories with one
402 single word. The city of Neuchâtel seems to be ashamed of my scientific work, but would
403 nevertheless and evermore like to benefit from my name.

404
405 The University of Neuchâtel is no better. It has its own Jelmini, in the form of Professor Schaer,
406 a geologist. He has compiled countless articles about me, one also published in the official
407 university history: without one single word about my so very important and central racial
408 theories.

409
410 The same applies to the great basic reference work, the Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (Swiss
411 historical encyclopaedia). One Mr Balmer writes about me therein. Nice things, but not one word
412 on my racial theories. Another flatterer who's ashamed of me.

413
414 And now, I should like to thank my true friends in Scotland.

415
416 I should like to suggest a look at the great Scottish philosopher David Hume, representative of
417 many others, who, a long time before me, wrote this: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be
418 naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion,
419 nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures
420 amongst them, no arts, no sciences." Yes, I did indeed teach what Hume taught. And what
421 Immanuel Kant taught, and what Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel taught. In very good company
422 I was, and shall continue to be so.

423
424 Have a nice evening!