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## Yet the Last Are Still Last

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# Yet the Last Are Still Last

Originally composed in New Orleans, Louisiana while on a Civil Rights Movement Pilgrimage and updated to reflect changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic

By Ellen Jewett

Saving up riches without regard for the other  
We see it in the rich fool of the Gospels  
We saw it on plantations  
Exploitation of persons  
Humans as disposable  
Beings owned by other beings  
Dressed up, fattened up, exercised, and auctioned off  
The notary signed off on the purchase  
Noting the person in front of you as “moveable property”  
Despite being created in God’s image

You recoup the eight hundred dollars you pay for a  
    person in four growing seasons  
Then their life is not worth protecting It’s easier to buy  
    someone else  
Or to rent them for the season  
Or to have your female slaves constantly pregnant  
Property bearing property  
Capital producing capital  
At no cost to you  
How economical

407,000 pounds of sugar in one year  
At the cost of how many lives?

Raising a child as your own  
A daughter to your childless wife  
At least until she’s older  
And attractive  
And can carry your child  
Whom you have baptized  
With your own name on his birth certificate  
But who is still considered property  
Because his mother was your slave  
Your slave whom you raped  
Little did you know

Your son would become a patriarch  
Pépère  
Two of his descendants become mayors of  
    New Orleans  
Is this the beginning of justice?  
Is this the coming of the Kingdom?  
“The last shall be first and the first shall be last”  
And yet the last are still last  
The “already but not yet”  
Seems to simply be the “not yet”

As Black bodies lie wounded in our streets  
In our jails  
In the shadows of society  
Dying from police violence  
From COVID-19  
From dehumanization  
From simple, brutal hate  
  
Justice is absent  
Yet again  
The same violence continues  
Just in new ways  
Where is the redemption in that?

Saving up riches without regard for the other  
We see it in the Gospels  
We saw it on plantations  
We saw it in lynchings  
We saw it in response to the Civil Rights Movement  
We see it today  
Monetary riches  
Material riches  
Emotional riches  
Social riches  
Awash in the blood of Black  
    bodies