Before and after “Brave Heart” – From the Middle Ages to African Enslavement

711  African Moors conquered Spain and Portugal. Cordova, the capital, was Europe’s most civilized city with paved, lamp-lit streets, libraries and public baths.

Ireland and Scotland share the same ancestry, a common language and customs. Ireland and Scotland were called Greater and Lesser Scotia.

1066  Before Roman times, slavery was normal in Britannia. From the 9th to the 12th centuries Dublin, Ireland was a major slave trading center involving Gaelic, Pictish, Vikings, Saxons and other kingdoms. There was still a slave trade operating out of Bristol in the 11th century. In 1086 over 10% of England’s population were (European) slaves.

1066-1087  William the Conqueror claimed England. Chattel slavery, which had existed before Roman occupation, gradually disappeared after the Norman conquest, replaced by feudalism and serfdom. William introduced a law prohibiting the sale of slaves overseas.

1180’s  The Anglo-Norman colonizers ruled Ireland harshly for centuries. In the Middle Ages people were born into proscribed roles: those who prayed, those who worked, those who fought, those who ruled and owned the land. As far as the English were concerned, they had good reason to despise the Irish. Gerald of Wales, a Chronicler with the British colonizers, described what he saw: the savage and uncivilized conduct of the native Irish people.

“The Irish are a rude people subsisting on the produce of their cattle only and living themselves like beasts, a people that has not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life—neither willing to give up their old habits or learn anything new, abandoning themselves to idleness and immersed in sloth. Their greatest delight is to be exempt from toil. Their richest possession: the enjoyment of liberty. This people, then, is truly barbarous. Indeed, all their habits are barbarisms. In whatever requires industry they are worthless.”

Topographia of Hibernia, 1188

1315-1316  The Scottish Bruces (Robert & Edward) invaded Ireland to expel the English but there was great famine across Europe and Ireland; the Bruces retreated.

1492  The Moors were expelled from Spain after more than 700 years. Columbus voyaged to the New World.

1591  Moroccans with Spanish support defeated the West African Songhoy Empire, a historical watershed event that opened the way for the capture, deportation and mass TransAtlantic enslavement of Africans.

1641  Following an Irish uprising, the British transported as many as 50,000 “rebels” to the West Indies and North America. New Scotland (Nova Scotia) was founded in Canada in the early 1600s. Edinburgh judges passed laws (1662-1665) ordering the enslavement, banishment or emigration of Scottish “rogues” and other “undesirables” to the colonies.

1661  The Barbados Slave Act established the British concept of chattel slavery, which treated Africans as beasts of burden with no right to life, and superseded (Irish and Scottish) white indentured servitude.

1715, 1746  Jacobite Scottish rebels were forcibly transported to the colonies after the uprising at Culloden in 1745. Scottish Highlanders are major slaveholders in the Caribbean, including sexual slavery.

1762  Forced evictions and displacement of Highland Scottish farming families from traditional land tenancies carried out by aristocratic hereditary landlords in the 18th and 19th centuries, the “Highland Land Clearances,” resulted in significant emigration to North America and Australia.

1776  The American “Revolution.”

1812  US - British war: Francis Scott Key, a slave-holding lawyer, wrote the “Star Spangled Banner,” which applauds slavery. The British granted freedom to the enslaved who fought on their side and resettled these Black Refugees in Nova Scotia after the war.