

Colonial Slave Trade

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From 1619 to 1776, the slave trade became a fixture of the colonial culture. The slave trade ultimately helped the English colonies become powerful enough to defeat the British Empire, but it also debased Africa's society to a point where Africa was left in ruin. The slave trade took advantage of the African people solely for European profit, especially for the British Empire. However, this profit led to the creation of the United States of America, and no matter how inhumane it may sound, propelled us to becoming a world power for years to come.

The Atlantic slave trade had existed over 100 years earlier in other European colonies in the Caribbean and off the African coast. When European traders were sailing off the coast of Africa, they encountered African tribes who were willing to part with their prisoners of war for certain products, such as guns and wealth. The African tribal leaders wanted these guns to fight against and trade with those in the inland of Africa. With the guns, the tribes on the coast were able to defeat the inland tribes and take more prisoners of war, which led to more slaves being sold to the Europeans. The Europeans then took these newly encountered slaves, put them into ships of deplorable conditions, and took the slaves to European colonies in the Atlantic. Here, the Europeans would sell their slaves to colonists in exchange of rum, sugar, and other agricultural products that were not produced in Europe. The traders would then sail back to their countries, sell their cargo to a middle-man, and eventually go back to Africa for more prisoners of war. This way of trading was known as triangular trading.

Before African slaves, the enslavement of the natives in the Americas was the preferred process of European powers. After they had invaded, however, many of the native peoples became fatally ill from diseases brought over by the Europeans. After war and the diseases, there were very few natives left for the Europeans to enslave.

Therefore, Europeans looked to the Africans they had encountered earlier to be their laborers. This practice was perfect for Europeans because Africans were more immune to European diseases. Africans were also not Christians, so it allowed the Europeans to feel morally fine about enslaving another human being.

Slavery was introduced to colonial British North America in 1619, when a Dutch trade ship came to Jamestown, Virginia with unsold slaves from the Caribbean. At first, the slaves were treated as indentured servants, which allowed some of them to become free after serving on someone's land for a certain amount of time. The slave population barely increased the first couple years after its introduction to the North American colonies because there were still plenty of English indentured servants still available. Over the next 20 years, the slave population would increase because less and less indentured servants came over from England. Also, the onset of tobacco becoming a major crop in the colonies stopped many potential servants away because the work was so grueling. Therefore, Africans were brought in to do the intense work.

Slave life for those working the fields was extremely difficult. Most slaves would work from sunrise to sunset in the fields with little to no breaks at all. They were treated extremely poorly by their masters and lived in filthy shelters. However, slaves were generally given Sundays off, and most family units were able to stay together as long as everyone behaved.

Slave life for those working in the cities was equally tough. Though their work as house servants or coachmen was not as physically demanding as the slaves in the fields, the urban slave population rarely ever was able to stay together as a family unit. Most white families only needed a one or two slaves, so slave families were constantly

broken up when the mother gave birth. This made the emotional burden on urban slaves almost unbearable

But in the 1660s, for reasons unknown, the social status of slaves was greatly reduced. Africans were beginning to outnumber whites in certain areas in the colonies, and people may have begun to feel threatened. There had also been some isolated incidents of slaves trying to approach white women, which led to many of these slaves being killed or severely beaten. By the 1670s, slave codes enacted by individual colonies made slavery a legal and racially based institution. In general, the codes prohibited slaves from owning any weapons, going to school, meeting one another or going places without the signed permission of their masters, and testifying against white people in court. Slaves received harsher punishments for some crimes compared to white people. It was also legal for master to kill his slave and generally receive no punishment, while other free white men would be punished pretty severely. The Virginia House of Burgesses also declared that "all servants not being Christians imported this colony by shipping shall be slaves for their lives."

By 1700 there were more than 20,000 slaves in North American colonies. This was due to the breakup of the Royal African Company monopoly in 1697, which opened the slave trade to an increase in competition, forcing prices to go down and increasing the number of slaves. By 1750, the slave population had increased to about 200,000 in North America alone. Most of these slaves lived in the South, where the fertile soil and warmer temperatures encouraged the development of plantations that grew tobacco, sugar cane, and cotton. While many of these plantations were small, some of the plantations were extremely large, where hundreds of slaves would be needed to tend to the land. These plantations grew larger and larger because they would be able to

produce more products and control the market price. This would lead the master of the plantation to buy more land, and eventually buy more slaves. Combining the continual the slave trade with the birthrate of slaves, the slave population was increased at an exponential rate.

During this whole time, the North American colonies had become accumulating more and more wealth because of the enormous plantations. The British Empire wanted bigger pieces of this wealth than they were getting before, so they began more items that had to be taxed. This issue combined with other decisions by the King of England eventually led to the American Revolution and the United States of America being created.

It is important to remember that without slavery, it is quite possible that the United States of America may not have been created. European nation's chief financial tool was the African slave trade. Without the slave trade, the Europeans would not have been able to continually have the funding to send people over to new parts of the world to establish new colonies. And without these colonies, the Europeans would not been able to receive the agricultural goods their society depended upon, which were traded for and grown by the African slaves. Though Europe may have found other ways of establishing themselves all over the world, the use of slavery led to the establishment of a colonial agricultural system, which proved pivotal to many different nations.

Though the Europeans profited off of the use of slavery, the Africans were taken advantage of at an equal rate. Corrupt African chieftains saw an opportunity to get rid of prisoners and receive items of value that they could trade to others in Africa or receive guns that could help in war. With these guns, coastal African villages were able to dominate over inland African villages, plundering whatever the inland people may

have had in wealth and then trading the villages' males to the Europeans for more goods. This vicious cycle has led to tribal hostility that has only progressed in today's world. If slavery had not been present to those coastal chieftains, then Africa may have been a different place.

Slavery led to the exploitation and oppression of Africa and many Africans. Millions more were kidnapped and enslaved, African societies were turned upside down, and entirely new societies were built on the labor and lives of Africans. Slavery and colonialism were carried out for the economic enrichment of Europe and its descendants. It was exploitation of African labor that led to the expansion of agriculture and beginnings of industry. Slavery and colonialism also created the circumstances, which confine Africans and African nations to some of the worst conditions experienced by any people in the world today. Though our great nation may have profited from such a horrific practice, this does not defend the practice of such uses of power in the future. We should learn the lessons of the colonial times and apply them to our policies, ensuring that such atrocities will never happen again.

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