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Slaves in Colonial America

The history of slavery from 1600 to 1776 is very complex and directly concerning the European slavery network. The main idea for increasing the slave population in colonial America was to increase productivity in the many plantations made in the American colonies. Most slaves were put to work in the sugar plantations of the original thirteen British colonies present in America. These slaves were imported directly from Africa through the famous Atlantic Slave Trade Network. In addition to the Africans, the local Indian population was also enslaved, but their numbers were meager compared to their African counterparts. This practice continued until the abolishment of Slavery by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. The Europeans, especially the British and the Portuguese were trading in slavery for a very long time. Yet, the roots of slavery in American were not placed until the 1600s. it is very interesting to know that the first group of African Slaves came with their consent with the famous liberal philosopher John Lok. The philosopher taught them English which gave the rulers the ideas in the first place. This later helped the British to establish a trade network in their colonies in America for the production of goods like Tobacco and Molasses (D Richardson).

In 1607, the British crown sanctioned their first colony on the American mainland called Jamestown, Virginia. After its establishment, the colony steadily elapsed into a tobacco-based economy. So, to drive the economy of Jamestown further, more slaves were needed. Slaves were gathered from the American natives as well as imported from Africa to establish a workforce so that the British Empire would be able to continue their trade activities. After there were a significant number of slaves in the British colony, the crown started the process of establishing legal protocols to govern slave trades.

The trade-in the American colonies was booming, therefore Africans were kidnapped from their homeland and forced into slavery. They mainly worked in the plantations of rice, tobacco, and indigo in the colonies of Georgia and Maryland. After the war of independence of 1776, the semi-industrialized economy of the Northern States started to link the cruelty done on the black slaves with the cruel rule of their former British masters. Hence, they concluded that slavery is a sin and therefore they started to abolish slavery in the northern states. Their southern brothers were in disagreement on this issue of slavery (FC Thames). Therefore, a compromise was made after the conclusion of the War of Independence in 1783. The new US constitution passed the famous "Three-fifth Law" about the representation of slaves in Congress.

In the late 1800s, the mechanization of the industrial sector led to unprecedented demands regarding American raw cotton. This was difficult as the seeds from the raw cotton crop needed to be picked out by hand, which required excessive labor and time. But that soon changed in the time to come. A school teacher named Eli Whitney came up with an invention called the Cotton Gin. This device was used to solve the seed picking problem related to cotton farming and soon a large number of slaves were imported by the southern states as it moved from tobacco to cotton as their main source of income. So, even after banning slave trading, there were plenty of slaves present already in the American colonies. The trade flourished and the slave population started to increase in the next fifty years. There were bumps along the way as well. The governments of the southern states had to put down several rebellions, the most noticeable of all of which was the one led by a black called Nat Turner in Virginia. Turner ended up murdering around sixty whites within two days which was put down by the local militia. This incident gave the southern authorities an excuse to further tighten the leash on the poor black slaves.

The north was moving against this barbarism and abolishment of slavery movement was gaining momentum. The narrative of the southerners that the black was “mindless animals possessed of little economic sense” was soon challenged by various mediums. William Lloyd Garrison founded a liberal newspaper called “The Liberator” in which he opened declared slavery as a sin. Not only that, the famous “Underground Railroad” was excessively used by the southern blacks to escape into the northern states (Foner). Such clash of practices further increased the tensions between the Northern and the Southern states. To counter several newly annexed states were divided to keep the pro-slavery and anti-slavery states in balance in the US congress.

These tensions to the issue of slavery soon acquired a critical shape when an anti-slavery politician Abraham Lincoln became the president of the United States. Seven southern states broke-off from the union and established the Confederate States of America. Soon, four more states joined the Confederacy and a civil war broke out. The Northern states won the war and as a result, the institution of slavery was abolished in the United States altogether in the proclamation of January 1st, 1863. This was further followed by the thirteen amendments in the US Constitution which ended slavery officially (Best).

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