

# Research paper on slavery in colonial america

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



## **Introduction**

This paper will analyse and discuss early American cultures of Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans with a view of understanding the impact of African culture on American society. The institution of slavery in the 17th and 18th Centuries will also be highlighted coupled with its effect on American society. Practices of slavery in the colonies and later in the United States before it was abolished will also be discussed. The topics will be discussed with a view of proving the thesis that slavery did indeed affected and impact colonial America.

## **Early American History of Three Cultures**

The three cultures that were present in early America were Europeans, Natives, and African Americans. Existence of Europeans in America dates back to 1492 when a Spanish expedition led by Christopher Columbus introduced a new world into the western hemisphere<sup>1</sup>. European culture in America was agricultural where they grew plantations of tobacco, coffee, and sugarcane, hence were mostly farmers. Furthermore, in the 19th century many people estimated to be over 50 million left Europe for America resulting to the rapid exchange of cultures, animals, plants, education and ideas, communicable diseases, and humans in form of slaves between Eastern and Western continents<sup>2</sup>.

Native Americans are the indigenous people in the continent and lived in a community that had many tribes. They originated from Eurasia through the Bering Strait which at that time was a dry land that resulted from a drop in sea level<sup>3</sup>. Their culture was inclined to survive as hunter-gatherers with

women being the ones to implement advanced farming of staples. This meant that their culture was quite different from Europeans and this resulted into a constant conflict in Columbian exchange era.

“ Africans originated in 1619 in America after a Dutch slave trader exchanged his cargo of Africans for food in Jamestown in the British colonies<sup>4</sup>.” Majority of African-Americans were slaves from Africa and therefore they practiced cultures that were similar to those in Africa. The cultures included, body piercing, African art, dancing, certain African cuisine, and ceremonies such as naming. However, because of slavery they found it hard to practice their culture which resulted in development of a different culture in comparison to that in Africa.

### **Impact of African culture on American society**

The culture of Africans in America is drawn from countries in Africa, Central, and Latin America and due to oppression and slavery it deviated slightly from that practiced in the original continents. Despite their limitation in practising their culture, they still managed to influence the society in America in majorly in aspects of religion, art and fashion, food, and names<sup>5</sup>. African culture however did not influence American society in aspects such as education, commerce, and agriculture. The reason why certain aspects of the society were not influenced was that the black culture was considered inferior and had to be refined<sup>6</sup>.

Religion was influenced when native practices such as libation to ancestors were incorporated in major religions in America such as the Quakers church. Furthermore, Islam religion which is considered an African religion, started to be practiced by the natives and Europeans. Fashion such as plaiting of hair,

wearing of certain African attires, and certain paintings and architecture found their way into the society. Languages commonly referred to as pidgin also resulted as a result of mixing English and native African languages. Example is the Creole language that is common in Louisiana<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, food was also vastly influenced when wild animals such as squirrels, waterfowls, and rabbits were added to diets in the society. The same was with names with African names being used to name children in the society. Slavery began in 1619 when a Dutch trader exchanged his African personnel with food in Jamestown, Virginia. The twenty Africans sold were servants who laboured for a certain period after which were released to join the society as free men. Slaves during this time were contracted for a certain period and consisted of people of all cultures. However, the racial aspect of slavery took place in 1680 when African servants were forced to work forever in inhumane conditions. This happened as Europeans and Natives were hindered from being slaves and Africans being the only people subjected to slavery. African rights and freedom were taken away and were used as property in commerce. " Furthermore, with the success of tobacco and cotton farming slavery was legalized in Maryland, Virginia, and Massachusetts<sup>8</sup>." By the end of the 17th century laws were formulated that slaves were to serve for life and that even their children were to be slaves.

The 18th century began with revolts by slaves which ended in massive executions in British colonies in America. This led to the slavery system being fully implemented in 1740 where masters were completely in control of their slaves. The massive revolts persisted which led to campaigns against the trade. This was seen in 1761 where the Quakers church expelled

members who were slave traders in profession. Many campaigns surfaced and this resulted to Washington passing policies that restricted slave trade in America in 1771. Furthermore, subsequent years of the 18th century saw slavery laws losing influence which ultimately resulted in the trade being illegalized in North American states in 1808. The South continued to practice slavery but fifty years later in 1865, after bloody revolutions by slaves, the institution was completely illegalized in America<sup>9</sup>.

## **Personal and Financial Effects of Slavery**

The emergence of slavery resulted in marked influences in both individuals and the nation as a whole. The system led to distinction of various cultures which were ranked in superiority. European culture was seen as the most superior culture compared to Native American and African respectively<sup>10</sup>. As a result of this, people could not freely interact with other cultures or even live near one another. This resulted in the emergence of poor neighbourhoods and affluent neighbourhoods all of which came as a result of segregation of various cultures. The country on the other hand was forced to be capitalistic where Europeans were the only ones allowed to practice commerce hence grew financially at the expense of natives and slaves<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, many slave traders grew rich quickly due to the trade especially when some visited Africa to capture or buy slaves cheaply to be sold into the economy. The nation also benefited considerably in terms of labour for plantations in the colony and financially from taxes obtained from slave trade. Industries such as tobacco, cotton, and other cash crops were profitable because profits escalated as the cost of keeping slaves remained low<sup>12</sup>. This made slavery very lucrative for the nation and slave masters.

## **Practices of Slavery**

Slavery in colonies of Americas and later in the United States of America transformed over the years and are characterised by different practices. In the beginning of slave trade in the 17th century, the type of slavery practiced was bonded labour<sup>13</sup>. This was where slaves were seen as indentured servants and pledged to work for some time only to be released soon. Practices in this slavery were house work, labourers in factories, plantation workers, and chefs all of which had the intention of imparting life skills that would be useful later in life<sup>14</sup>. Slavery at this time had no racial dimension with people of all cultures being indentured servants. Over the years racial slavery started to set in and this ultimately resulted in forced labour mostly for Africans. Slaves were captured and forced against their will to work in plantations, households, farm, and even in constructions. With the legalization of slave trade in the early years of United States, chattel slavery was practiced. This system was where slaves were viewed as personal property and their masters could do to them anything. However, with illegalization of slavery, practices such as human trafficking resulted where women were sold as prostitutes, and children as labourers<sup>15</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

It is therefore evident that slavery affected colonial America by enhancing slavery, and violation of human rights. Economically the system was advantageous as many slave traders grew wealthy, but socially Africans and Native Americans were segregated and made to live in lesser developed neighbourhoods. The impact of this system led to societal changes in aspects such as religion, art and fashion, food, and naming of children.

## **Bibliography**

Edmund S. M., 1975. American Slavery, American Freedom: the ordeal of colonial Virginia. New York: WW Norton & Company. Pp. 21-215

GRADEN, DALE T. and Gerald Horne. 2009. The deepest south: The united states, brazil, and the african slave trade. Journal of Latin American Studies 41, no. 1: 159-159-161.

Rose, P. I., 2009. Slavery and its aftermath. New York: Atherton Press. Pp. 5-194

William, D., 2000. American Slavery. New Jersey: Greenhaven Press. Pp. 1-32

Wood, B., 2005. Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Pp. 2+