

# Slavery in colonial america



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The first historically recorded slavery of black Africans in America took place in 1619 and the Dutch were behind the first slave trade. An unknown Dutch ship, its name and passengers not recorded had held only 20 black Africans as captives in a fierce battle with a ship of the Spaniards who were Caribbean-bound. The ship of the Dutch was extremely ravaged by the first battle and only made worse by a destructive storm before it landed ashore at the coast of Jamestown, regarded as the first official English settlement in what is now the United States.

The purpose of the African slaves was only to help in the repairs that the ship needed, but utterly surging mortality rates from various diseases, dispute with native Indians and starvation hindered the rise of the number of strong-bodied workers. With the Dutch ship severely in need of help, supplies and repairs and the white colonists needing able laborers, the African captives were traded in exchange for services and for food.

The white settlers of Jamestown, Virginia, who themselves were migrants from England, had agreed upon the decision to treat the black captives as indentured servants, which denoted as servants for only a certain amount of time, just to pay off for their settlement in a new and foreign land. Initially, the African servants were treated in the same respect as with the European indentured servants and were set free after a specific amount of time.

The freed servants, African or even the European, were also given land and resources and they themselves also morphed into landowners and slave-owners in the Eastern Shore. Unfortunately for the black servants, apparent similarity with regards to the rights of European and their rights did not

survive long. Indentured servitude was not to survive long in Virginia, for it was to be later replaced by racial slavery. The transformation from indentured servitude to absolute racial slavery did not occur overnight, it happened gradually.

Early in Virginia's existence as one of the first colonies in America, there exist no laws concerning slavery. Nevertheless, in 1640, a black servant was condemned to lifetime slavery by the Virginia courts and subsequently in 1654, another black indentured servant, John Casor was sentenced to be a property for life by a Northampton court. Although as aforementioned that there were no laws concerning slavery in Virginia's early years, but as expected, in 1705, the Virginia Slave codes made apparent the future of black servants in America.

Came 1740 and the system of slavery was at full throttle. In the course of the British colonial period, virtually every colony had slavery present in it. The slaves in the north were primarily servants in the house, performing duties not as rigorous as those done by the servants in the south. The servants in the south were more of slaves for they work on farms, on plantations, with crops composed of tobacco, rice, cotton and indigo.

Usually, the black slaves were used by plantation owners and wealthy farmers who commercially export their products. Mediocre farmers seldom use slaves for manpower. II. The Evolution of the Slavery System The notion by which individuals of African ancestry and of the black complexion were regarded as personal property of white people or slave masters became the dominated North America for approximately three fourths of the three and a

half centuries since the first batch of Africans landed ashore there with the Dutch.

The influences of slavery continued to flourish despite the fact that the English colonies gained their independence and conceived national ideals in absolute opposition to the inhumane slavery. In spite of many ideological disputes, the system of slavery was continued in the United States up until the end of the Civil War, and the rampant anti-black concepts propagated by slavery still continued from then on. Before the outbreak of the American Revolution, all of the colonies had slavery existent in them, by way of Virginia.

The principles of the American Revolution and the inadequate abundance of slavery in the North culminated in the desertion of the northern states in the latter part of the 18th century and in turn, the force of slavery in the South surged, with the ever-increasing demand for low-priced labor by the cotton, tobacco and corn plantation owners and farmers. By the mid-19th century, approximately 90 percent of all American blacks were residing in the South and also an overwhelming 90 percent of this group were owned slaves.

The life of a slave in the plantation was hard, and no mercy or even consideration were ever given to their African culture and traditions. The most inhumane practices and the most gruesome treatment of black people were very rampant in this era. In addition, slave markets also existed during the time, to make easy the finding and purchasing of slaves for houses and plantations. In the slave market, another inhumane and merciless act was

practiced by the white slave owners and that was the cutting of family ties and tribal links.

Men were separated from their wives and their families. Almost half of all the slaves in America were owned by a mere 10 percent of the total number of slave owners, which was estimated number 385, 000. The concentration of a great number of slaves within a partial number of agricultural and plantation units had had profound effects on the lives of most of the slaves. Under the command of the plantation owner or the slave master, gang labor was the usual kind of employment. Brutality was common and harshness was a matter of conventional practice.

Penalties and punishments were implemented at the consent of the slave owner, or sometimes, they were the ones who do the punishments. They were not allowed to own any form of property, unless their slave owners permitted them to do so. Their human rights never even existed, exemplified by the ruling that a rape of a female slave was not seen as a crime except when the rapist was entering another man's property, and it was only to be ruled as trespassing. Moreover, the very basic right to defend themselves from violence was not recognized by law.

Their downtrodden identities were only complemented by their poor housing, poor clothing and food adequate only to sustain their strengths in the desired level of work by their slave masters. Black slaves neither could present evidence in court against a white individual. Moreover, slave masters emphasized the total submission of a slave to them and extreme punishments awaited those slaves who did not comply. Virtually in all of the

South, teaching a black slave to read or write was illegal, thus making almost all blacks illiterate.