

# History of slavery argumentative essay sample

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Slavery has existed for a long time, with many people regarding it as the most astonishing phenomena. Slavery is exceedingly unnatural occurrence that provokes mixed feelings from the heart of every individual. Many people are descendants of those who used to be slaves several years ago. It is surprising that some still face slavery in the contemporary times. By definition, slavery is a societal institution-based dominance, ownership, and exploitation of an individual by another<sup>1</sup>. Other scholars also define slavery as owning another person unlawfully, with the sole purpose of exploiting the labor of the person for enjoyment or gain of the owner. Majority of people usually think of the phenomena as the period in the history of the United States where the practice of slavery painted itself as evil by many or secluded reports in the current media of private slave ownership but fail to recognize the concise history of this phenomenon. The aim of this paper is to conduct an in depth analysis on the origin and history of slavery to the present day. The reality and truth of the matter is that the practice of slavery is as old as civilization itself.

Before civilization, primitive farmers, first humans, and hunters and gatherers were self-sustaining and did not see the need for slaves. They grew and collected just enough food to feed on their own. They did not view owning another person as a source of economic advantage, since for them getting one more person meant more responsibility. Evidence from recorded literature reveals that slavery has existed in many cultures. It was however rare among hunter-gatherer populations, which makes the practice a matter of system of social stratification. The success of mass slavery requires high population density and economic surpluses. Owing to these factors, the

practice and growth of slavery would only have flourished after the invention of farming during the Neolithic revolution, which is about eleven thousand years ago<sup>2</sup>. Most of the significant technological developments occurred during this period including domestication of plants and animals. Such developments resulted into the emergence of urban centers, trade, and other things considered as aspects of “ civilization”.

The emergence of these cities and towns created increased demand for food because more people started moving into the cities from the countryside creating shortages of labor in the farms. From a business perspective, large farms or industries require large source of cheap labor for the long-term success. Such conditions created a suitable environment for practicing slavery since they provided the much needed labor force at minimal cost. In all ancient civilizations, slaves provided the much-needed labor since easy to get and cheap. The major source of slaves during this period was war. The major source of supply of slaves during this period was war, since it was frequent and brutal in the early civilization. Defeated towns had to surrender, and its occupants taken as slaves in order to provide labor. Other means of acquiring slaves included criminal sentenced to slavery, pirates who offered their captives for sale, poor families selling their children, and the children of slaves, even though only few slave owners allowed their slaves to raise families.

However, recorded and confirmed slavery bears their origins in either Egypt or Sumeria. Hieroglyphics from Egypt shows that they enslaved other human beings. The Code of Ur- Hammurabi, which dates back to the eighteenth century BC, contains the oldest detailed outline of laws on how to treat

slaves. It gives some fascinating rewards and penalties received by surgeons operating on slaves or free men. It is however surprising to note that slaves in Babylon owned property. The ancient Greece is one of the first civilizations that provide concrete information on slavery.

The ancient Greeks relied heavily on slaves as a source of labor force and they mainly preferred women and children as compared to men. However, children born to slave women with free fathers assumed the status of their father. The continued growth of Greek cities and commercial production of cotton resulted into an increase in demand for slaves, resulting to increased warfare. Reports have it that Athens had more slaves than free citizens in the fifth century. The Roman Empire trained slaves on all possible functions to serve on numerous positions. Several slaves died mining silver and gold for the Empire. In the second century BC, plantation slavery had begun in Rome, with Cicely experiencing numerous bouts of slave revolts, resulting into the massive uprising led by Spartacus<sup>3</sup>.

The church started condemning slavery in the early Middle Ages - opposing only slavery of Christians by 'infidels'. From eight hundred AD, the Vikings raided Britain and sold their captives to Islamic Spain and Istanbul. During this period, religion presented no barrier to the slave trade. A plague epidemic commonly known as the Black Death claimed many lives culminating into increased demand for slaves in Italy. Slaves suspected of killing their masters received cruel punishments. An interesting part was an attempt by Pope Paul III to mitigate Protestantism by threatening those who abandoned Catholic Church enslavement.

The Atlantic slave trades, inaugurated by the Portuguese traders in

conjunction with Spain's conquest of the Caribbean virtually served to wipe the indigenous culture. It was not long before other colonial nations poured in the Americas to pillage them. Slaves provided labor to produce cotton, sugar, and tobacco. After realizing that the native Indians were dying out, traders imported many Africans, and by 1600, more than nine hundred thousand slaves had landed in America. Many European colonists travelled to West Africa trading arms, tobacco, and trinkets for slaves. This led to the emergence of the famous Middle Passage, in which a large number of slaves loaded lying in holds of ships in order to create more space<sup>4</sup>. The British was the major traders, bringing with them goods from England to exchange live cargo, which they sold to Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the New World.

The practice received a blow with the emergence of abolitionist movements in the eighteenth century. In 1804, Danes made slave trade illegal; followed by Britain in 1807 and a year later in America. Institution of Anti-Slavery International was to follow in 1839, just a few years before complete abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. This changed the economic climate in Britain as they started looking for labor force in their domestic economies. The slaves were instrumental in helping America get independence from the British rule in the American War of Independence.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is evident that slavery dates back to emergence of civilization in various parts of the world including Africa. Slavery has continued as a global menace in several regions of the world after emancipation in North America. Debt bondage, indigenous slavery in sub-

Sahara, and forced labor in Europe still thrive. In Congo, nine million people lost their lives to forced labor. Following the formation of the United Nations, every member state obliged to outlaw slavery. Nevertheless, experiences with slavery throw a long shadow as the United Nations looks for ways of compensating countries that suffered from slavery.

## **Bibliography**

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