

Essay on united states introduction of african slavery

[Countries](#), [England](#)



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Introduction

The North American continent experienced great changes between the years 1450 to 1750. European settlers began to venture into the land of the Native Americans during this time when they largely transformed and destroyed the outlook of the natives' world. The European explorers settled on the land of the Americas and acquired their natural wealth. In addition, these European settlers travelled to Africa and started a trans-Atlantic trade of slaves. The Atlantic slave trade eventually brought millions of African slaves to America (Morgan, 2003). With time, this slave trade grew to lead to a new economic and social system. Someone's race would eventually determine if he or she could live as a free citizen or be a slave for the rest of his or her lives. This paper discusses the introduction and evolution of African slavery in the North American British colonies.

African slavery in the North American British colonies

The start of slavery in the North American British colonies is complex and historians have proposed several theories to explain the slave trade. The

European settlers set up Jamestown as their first permanent colony in early 1607. Tobacco was the main cash crop of the colony because of the efforts put by John Rolfe in early 1611 (Taylor, 2002). The European settlers needed more labor since tobacco was becoming a major drive for the colony.

Therefore, the English settlers used indentured servants as the first form of labor in the tobacco farms. The indentured servants provided their services free up to seven years after which they were free to live in Jamestown as normal citizens (Wood, 2005). However, with time, these servants became too expensive for the colonists to use them and in 1619; the first African slaves entered Jamestown.

Historians date the origin of slavery in the North American colonies to the year 1619 (Taylor, 2002). During that year, Dutch traders docked their ship at Point Comfort, which was a checkpoint for ships in Jamestown that wanted to trade with the colonists. The Dutch ship was carrying African slaves and since the crew of the ship was starving, the traders decided to exchange twenty of their slaves for food and other supplies. John Rolfe's letter to the Virginia treasurer notes that the presence of slaves in the North American's colonies began in 1619 even though the African slaves could have been present in the colonies earlier.

The importation of African captives supported the need for colonial labor in the colonial United States. At first, the English colonists treated the African slaves as indentured servants where they would be free of their duties after serving in the tobacco plantations for several years. This treatment was equivalent to the one of the poor English workers that worked in the tobacco

farms (Taylor, 2002). However, within the course of the new century, a new race-based slavery system began. This system ensured that the African slaves and other African American citizens remained as slaves for their entire life.

Before the introduction of African slaves in the British colonies of North America, the practice was common in the Central and South America. The South and Central America had already introduced oppressive slave laws that governed the Africans and Indians that worked in these countries. With time, the colonists established individual British colonies of North America and introduced laws in each of them on how the slaves would work. Among the colonies that had established slavery, was the colony of Virginia.

In the early history of Virginia, Africans and the poor whites shared similar status where both men and women of these races worked together in the fields as slaves. No one broke the working contract, as punishment would be the result of anyone that failed. The African slaves could not read or write English and thus they hardly understood what an indentured servant contract meant. Before Great Britain restricted its citizens from taking part in the slave trade, the colonists had forcibly transported about 600, 000 African slaves to North American British colonies (Wood, 2005).

The African slavery grew in the North American colonies because the Native Americans had developed some problems. These natives had become susceptible to European diseases, they were unsuitable for the labor-intensive agricultural practices and they had avenues for escape to their

land. “ In 1621, the colonists brought “ Antonio the Negro” to the Virginia colony when the colonial law had not defined slavery based on race” (Morgan, 2003, p. 121). With time, Antonio changed his name after marrying Mary, an African American servant. Antonio became Anthony Johnson and he and his wife became free and could own land and cattle. The couple even hired indentured servants on their land.

In 1640, some servants escaped from the Virginia plantations, two being white and one black. However, they were caught and the owner of the plantation extended the indenture contract of the two white servants but sentenced the black servant by the name John Punch to work in the field for life. Therefore, the status of John changed from an indenture servant to that of a slave. The colonists falsely accused the African indenture servants in order to keep them as slaves for their entire life.

Massachusetts was the first North American British colony to legalize slave trade in the year 1641 (Rushforth et al., 2008). The colony of Virginia later legalized enslavement of black Africans in 1661, which brought a drastic change to Africans brought to Virginia at that time. In the past, the English colonists believed that they could only enslave non-Christians or other captives from war. Africans were among those people that fit in the definition of slaves for the colonists. However, if the captives later learned English or changed to Christianity it meant that they would no longer work as slaves, which posed a dilemma for the colonists. Therefore, the colonists did not determine the status of Africans by changing their religious beliefs but through their skin color, which did not change.

The white elite that owned property in Virginia perceived some of the African indentured servants that were free as a threat. The whites foresaw the possibility of the blacks owning land and eventually overtaking them. Therefore, the colonists put strict restrictions on ownership of land, which caused intense unrest among the recently freed indentured servants. The unrest was so severe that in 1676, the freed servants burnt Jamestown to the ground. This unrest made the indentured servitude to become less pleasing to the ruling class of Virginia. The indentured servants had the opportunity to move on after their contract expired, which made the process of continuous replacement of these servants expensive for the plantation owners (Wood, 2005). Therefore, it became practical to enslave Africans for their entire life because they were easily identifiable via their black skin color. The colonists found it even advisable to legalize the slavery of African children.

In 1663, a court in Virginia ruled that any child born to a slave mother would also be a slave. This ruling ensured the passing of slavery from one generation to another. " In 1705, the General Assembly in Virginia declared that all servants imported and brought in the country that were not Christians in their native country would be slaves" (Rushforth et al., 2008, p. 213). The demands for slaves in the North American British colonies increased and in turn, the English suppliers acted immediately to bring in more slaves. In the 18th century, the number of African slaves coming into the North American British colonies increased to 45, 000 each year for a period of fifty years. This number was so big that the British colonies became

the largest traffickers of African slaves during that time surpassing Spain and Portugal. The African slavery in the British colonies was so severe that most slave owners tortured and killed the Africans even after introducing inhumane laws. In 1700 when the English suppliers were taking some of the new slaves to Jamestown, they witnessed an extreme case of torture. A slave was hanging from a tree and this scene sent a strong message to the slaves about what awaited them.

Conclusion

England established the British colonies in the continent of North America in the early 1600s as they sought to gain a secure colonial position. The colonists established the first colony at Jamestown Virginia in 1607. The colonists established other colonies later in Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina and Georgia. In the beginning, the poor whites and the Africans worked as indenture servants and were free of their contract after working for several years. However, as the century progressed, the colonists developed a race-based system that ensured Africans and African Americans became slaves for the rest of their lives. The captive population with time became rebellious and the slave owners introduced severe laws to deal with them.

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