

# Slavery in america

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Slavery in America African slaves were imported to America as early as early 17th century to work in tobacco, rice and indigo plantations which thrived well in these regions. Studies have estimated that approximately 6 to 7 million slaves were brought to America during the 17th and 18th centuries. Following the American Revolution, many colonists began campaigning for the abolition of slavery and a ban on the further import of slaves to the US was adopted by the new constitution. While most of the northern states abolished slavery the institution thrived in the southern regions despite laws and regulations that abolished the practice of slave trade. However, this was not the case to be as after the invention of the cotton gin that allowed easy removal of seeds from the raw cotton plant, cotton plantations increased in the southern states of the country and along with it the demand for slaves. Their lives, marriages and having children largely depended on their masters. A large majority of the masters made their slaves completely dependent on them and imposed a lot of restrictions on their living. They were prevented from gaining basic education, and their marriages were not legalized by law and their day to day activities were strictly monitored and restrictions were imposed at random. There were several revolts against the oppression by slave owners which did little to curtail slave trade. It was only after the rise of the abolition movement and the emancipation that followed the civil war during the Lincoln government slaves across America were freed. The 13th amendment of the US constitution officially declared the abolishment of slavery (Slavery in America). Slavery in America was a fitting example of the authority and power of the masters over the life of their slaves. Masters generally governed every aspect of the life of their slaves. By preventing them from gaining basic education that would enable them to

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learn other forms of labor or trade and allow them to support their living, slave owners made the slaves completely dependent on them for their food, clothing and shelter which also were provided in minimal quantities and to enable the slave to carry out the orders of the master. However, on a comparative basis slaves residing in urban settlements lived in more favorable conditions compared to those in the rural areas and in plantations (Boston). Both men and women slaves were made to perform tough tasks that drained them both mentally and physically. All the slaves were beaten by their masters and no mercy was shown to on the basis of their gender or age. While black men were initially employed as slaves, African women were brought as slaves by the Dutch only to provide company to these men; however, while the men folk was largely employed in carpentry and as blacksmiths, the women were slowly drawn to the fields to perform agricultural labor. In fields where both the men and women were employed work was divided on the basis of the physical activity involved with the men assigned with more strenuous work. While the primary responsibility of African women was motherhood which were highly respected, African women slaves were allowed to get pregnant and beget children solely with the intention of increasing the labor force for the master. Though marriages between slaves were not legalized until they gained their freedom, masters encouraged these unions between men and women slaved solely for the purpose of increasing the slave population. In addition, the masters also reasoned that slaves who had families were also less likely to escape from bondage and would be forced to continue to work at least for the sake being with their families. In some cases both the mother and father belonged to the same master while in some relationships the partners belonged to

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different owners and the husband and wife met only after completing their obligation to their masters (Williams). Slave women were entitled to some benefits during their pregnancy such as more food and less work; however following child birth the slaves were forced to return to the fields leaving the newborn children to caretakers. By this the masters hoped to sever the bonding between the mother and child as it would result in the women folk going back to her normal routine and also children raised by caretakers could be easily enforced into labor from a young age (Hallam; Williams). For the sake of begetting children women were also forced into sexual relationships with men that only resulted in increased psychological and physical turmoil for the women (Hallam). Many slaves, particularly in the southern states, were strictly prohibited from learning to read or write as their masters feared that education might give them the courage to revolt. Slave education was not forbidden in the North and many black schools helped the slaves to gain basic education. However, these schools struggled to keep afloat due to financial constraints and lack of support from the white population. Despite these difficulties slaves continued to express their thoughts and feelings in the form of poetry or stories in their own language (The Slave Experience: Education, Arts and Culture). Slaves with families lived with the constant fear of separation as masters frequently sold or exchanged slaves like any other commodity. They were sold in order to pay of the debts of the owner or following the death of the owner. The sale of the slaves were solely based on the discretion of their masters and hence the slaves could do very little to keep their family intact. In cases where the mother, father and children were all separated the pain and anguish was difficult to bear. This practice of severing family ties among slaves was later

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used as a main agenda in the propagation against slavery by the slave revolts. When slavery ended in the US after the civil war, those who were separated from their families made frantic searches for their kith and kin by placing adverts in the newspapers or by seeking the assistance of the government in finding their family members. Following their unions, slaves sought to legalize their weddings with their partners and lived together as families (Williams). Slave revolts initially began in the northern states led by free blacks with the support of some members from the white population. These revolts resulted in the implementation of strict codes in the southern region. However, as the anti-slavery movement gained strength during the 1930s to 1960s the northerners helped slaves from the south to escape captivity by establishing the Underground Railroad system. Following the Civil War that took place in the years 1861-65, anti-slavery movement gained enough momentum and many slaves resorted to self-emancipation until Abraham Lincoln, who openly supported abolishment of slavery, officially announced the emancipation proclamation that guaranteed freedom to all the slaves in the states. While the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments officially banned slavery, offered equal protection to the black population and gave them the right to vote, the life of those freed was distraught with challenges as these constitutional provisions were overlooked at many instances. The former slaves suffered immense difficulties and hardships during the reconstruction period that began in 1865 and lasted up to 1877 and strived hard to maintain their long-fought freedom in the new world (Slavery in America). References 1. "Slavery in America." History. com. History. n. d. Web. 15 Dec. 2012. <http://www.history.com/topics/slavery> 2. Boston, Nicholas. "The Slave Experience: <https://assignbuster.com/slavery-in-america-essay-samples-2/>

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