

# [Slavery’s global impact and economic justifications, yesterday and today essay](https://assignbuster.com/slaverys-global-impact-and-economic-justifications-yesterday-and-today-essay/)

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Slavery’s Global Impact and Economic Justifications, Today and Yesterday Slavery existed in some form in every region of the world. During the earliest civilizations, slave labor built nations and empires in Europe, Egypt, Greece, Asia and Africa. Thousands of years later, the Portuguese, Dutch and English realized the profit value that a market in human capital would provide. Africans were exported from their homeland to the New World under the most miserable conditions imaginable. Prof. Marcus Rediker, author of The Slave Ship, A Human History says, “ We’re fascinated by all the tall ships except the most important one, and that’s the slave ship.

And that one we can hardly bear to look at”. Slaves were packed like sardines below the ships stinking decks, and as many as 1. 5 million perished as a result of illness, suicide, insurrection, and sometimes murder by example (Rediker, 2007).

African slaves were treated as less than human, and used as labor for the sugar cane fields of the Caribbean. They were considered the cash cow of the modern world’s economy; the human capital that would be central to the growth of the economy in a country that was nearly torn apart by abolition, civil war and slave revolts as a result of state’s rights and the slavery debate. The history of slavery is firmly rooted in our consciousness from pre-Columbian to colonial days and it is up to the reader to wrestle with and conceptualize the complexities of slavery’s history. While slavery has historically been the catalyst that has brought outrage and racial unrest, slave owners justified the need for slavery because it was considered to be beneficial to the country for economic reasons. Abraham Lincoln once said “ Although volume upon volume is written to prove slavery a very good thing, we never hear of a man who wishes to take the good of it by being a slave himself. ” The inhumanity of slavery subjected Africans to much suffering upon their arrival to the New World as the illustration depicts below: [pic] ttp://office. microsoft. com/en-us/clipart/default.

aspx Slavery has taken several forms since its inception and has been practiced in all the ancient civilizations of Africa, Asia, Europe and pre-Columbian America. During ancient times, slaves were regarded as one of the spoils of war and became the property of kings, priests and temples. Rome was the victor against Carthage in the first and last of the three Punic wars fought for control of the Mediterranean Sea. “ Punic” was derived from the word “ Poenicus” which meant ‘ dark skin’ or ‘ Phoenician’.

Rome continued to expand its territories after the second war, starting the third war in 149 BC after becoming involved in a dispute regarding Africa and taking Numibia’s side against Carthage. Carthage was defeated and Africa became a Roman province. After the Punic Wars, Rome became a slave-based society, putting slaves to work on large and profitable plantations. During different dynasties in China, slaves were acquired through war and kidnappings; some peasants borrowed money they could not repay.

Others would lose their land to nobles and rich merchants. They would be forced to work the land without any hope of ever owning it again. When emperors would try to intervene to redistribute the land equally to the peasantry, the nobles and merchants would reacquire it. However, in times of crisis, the Chinese government recognized how important peasants were to the country’s survival and began to make sure they were cared for. The population of slaves was as small as one percent in China for the men and women who worked as slaves in households for royalty taking care of horses, banging drums to mark the time of day, opening and closing doors for people entering the palace, waiting on guests of the royal family, and very rarely working on farms. When resources were scarce, peasants sold themselves to have a place to eat or live, or sold their children into slavery in an effort to settle a debt. In extreme instances, they sometimes killed their children because of lack of food. “ In India, Hindu law dictates that a slave should not be mistreated.

A slave was to be housed, clothed and fed, and, in certain cases, could be beaten, but only on their back when punished. A slave could try to escape once, and if they succeeded they could go back to their caste. If an owner was very religious, he would treat his slaves well” (Bogucki, 2008). In reality though, the life of a slave was different from what the religion required.

Often a slave’s life was filled with terror; in most cases, they were mistreated, beaten, and killed for the slightest infraction. They were forced to haul water in poor weather, carry heavy loads of goods or other supplies and were responsible for the upkeep of their owner’s homes. Some royal governments imported slaves from Greece to work as palace guards.

Women and castrated males (eunuchs) were used to protect a king’s harem of concubines and some women guards would become connubial. Ewald (1992) suggests that slavery and the slave trade in the Atlantic and Islamic Africa cannot be compared. The Islamic world began trading slaves a thousand years before the Atlantic slave trade. Slaves who sailed on the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, or those who crossed the Sahara Desert ended up in Muslim societies. Rulers and owners of large tracts of land used thousands of slaves for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, usually in dire conditions.

“ Of the Saharan salt mines it is said that no slave lived there for more than five years. ” (Lewis, 1994). Slavery in the New World was much different from most parts of Africa, where slavery was not based on race. The institution of modern slavery was influenced as society began to look at the world from a different perspective. The Renaissance period from 1450 to 1600 promoted the idea that the rights and interests of the individual took precedence over the benefit of others, and the Commercial Revolution found new ways to exploit commercial interests. Commercialism’s rise and the promotion of self-interest resulted in competition and greed. The combination of these two ideologies dominated society and fueled modern slavery. Pre-modern slaves were not needed as substantially for work in the fields, and slavery initially depended upon the needs of the wealthy.

Europeans began bringing slaves to Europe in the 14th century as servants and justified it with the servant’s introduction to Christianity until it became a profitable and accepted part of the European method to generate revenue. By the end of the 15th century, even though slavery was well established in Europe, there was no substantial demand for slaves, thus, it had no profitable future. In 1740, Malachy Postlethwayt, a British merchant, rgued for parliamentary subsidies for slave trade, stating that this enterprise would make England prosperous.

British ships would carry manufactured goods to West Africa, barter with the local rulers to exchange the merchandise for slaves. Slaves were packed into ships for the “ middle passage” to the West Indies and sold for rum and sugar which was transported back to England. Despite the fact that slave traders attempted to justify the necessity of slavery for economic and other reasons, Walter Rodney, a Guyanese historian, argued that the Atlantic slave trade “ distorted economies and stimulated slavery within Africa” (Ewald, J. 992). Native American Indians were the first slave owners in North America, enslaving other tribes from raids or battles and were also unsuccessfully used as slaves by Europeans. White European-Americans found it profitable to ship Africans to the Americas as slaves.

In the New World, African men, women and children were treated as property while they built America and made white slave owners rich. White slave owners considered themselves superior, and that their “ superiority” was God-given. Slaves were viewed as non-human; therefore, slave owners felt they could deny them basic human rights. The illustration below shows slaves working in tobacco fields from dawn to dusk under their master’s watchful eye: [pic] http://office. microsoft. com/en-us/clipart/default.

aspx Slaves could not possess property, marry or enter into contracts. African slaves were forced to work the sugar plantations in the Caribbean, cotton, and tobacco plantations in the South because Europeans refused to. Slaves outnumbered Europeans ten to 1 in most cases and rebelled in many ways that challenged slavery, but most of their efforts were repressed through harsh discipline.

Considering the fact that slaves had to abide by many laws, the life of a slave was miserable, and in many cases, short. In the Caribbean, French and British sugar planters craved wealth so much so, that they would work slaves to death to feed their avarice. Slaves were punished for the slightest infraction; running away would most likely be a death sentence, with almost no exception. Slave overseers in Brazil in the 19th century had no financial reason to keep slaves healthy and discipline was dispensed with an iron hand, causing slaves to have a life span of about seven years. In South Africa, from 1680 to 1795, one slave per month was executed in Cape Town and the decaying corpse would be re-hung around town as a deterrent to other slaves. Slaves known as Caffers, or “ the hangman’s black assistants”, were armed with a sword with an iron hilt and a heavy club and were used to enforce strict slave laws by meting out punishment to other slaves.

On the South Atlantic island of St. Helena, “ punishments of up to 100 lashes were given to slaves for offenses such as stealing, housebreaking, striking or assaulting whites, or ‘ giving saucy language’, and, of course, for running away”(Rodriguez and Day, 1999,). Today, over 27 million people are enslaved or work as forced laborers. In some countries in Asia, slavery has never been abolished. Rodriguez and Day (1999), state that in 1995, Hard Times: 30 Months in a Chinese Labour Camp was published by Lin Zongren. As a result, some members of Congress expressed a desire to end China’s trade status if substantial reforms were not forcefully put into place in the field of human rights. Children are also forced to work against their will without any rights.

A 16-year old Pakistani named Iqbal Masih was murdered after eight years of enslavement in a carpet mill when he came forward to champion reforms to stop children from being abused. There is strong evidence today that slavery has not been abolished worldwide. Anti-Slavery International presented an award to Pureza Lopes Loiola in 1997, for her fight against the enslavement of the rural estates’ poor in Brazil. An award was given to Mauretania’s Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara for his mission to end slavery there. The chart below shows numbers of forced labor victims in various parts of the world: [pic]The illegal trade of humans is a vile and egregious violation of human rights. The forced movement of people from country to country has occurred since the inception of the laws governing supply and demand (Feingold, 2005). Although sex trafficking is what comes to mind when we think of human trafficking, according to Feingold, less than half of all trafficking victims are part of the sex trade.

[pic] (Source: http://www. caglecartoons. com/) In actuality, it is labor trafficking driven by poverty that is more widespread because the labor market worldwide is much greater than the sex market. In Brazil for instance, girls could be trafficked to work in the sex trade, while men are tasked to work the gold mines of the Amazon jungle. The cocoa plantations of the Ivory Coast enslave children for work there. Child brides are trafficked in China in poorer areas that have no marriage-age females as a result of the one-child policy and the sex selection of rural families who prefer only baby boys.

The proposed solutions to the trafficking problem from tightening the borders, sanctions and prosecution, to sending the victims back home are varied and debatable. Tightening the borders has increased trafficking; international humanitarian organizations feel sanctions could only be applied to countries already sanctioned and would threaten unresponsive countries (China, Nigeria or Saudi Arabia); prosecution would not work because the nature of the trafficking business enables the convicted trafficker to be replaced with no immediate effect on the overall scale of this enterprise; and sending victims back to their native countries would only endanger them and their families (Feingold, 2005). In summary, with the anti-slavery movement, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation’s abolishment of slavery, along with the eventual advent of industrialization and mechanization, a slave owner no longer had the need for slave labor in tobacco fields or on sugar plantations; therefore, the enormous profits slavery once garnered dwindled during that era, and slavery was no longer regarded as a justification of economic sustenance in America. However, slavery is history’s most powerful expression of racism in the U.

S. , and the descendants of slavery, as a result, are still undervalued, underestimated, and marginalized. Society still views the effects of slavery as a key reason for problems faced by black people in America. Moreover, slavery in the form of human trafficking still persists across the globe with the subjugation of young women and boys into forced child labor and prostitution. Even though the name of the beast has changed in a technological age, slavery was and forever remains an abominable and most inhumane practice. “ When we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy it implies, then the “ division” of humanity will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form. – Simone de Beauvoir, (French writer and feminist, 1908-1986).

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