

Racism and economics on the atlantic slave trade assignment

[History](#)



There was an enormous need for a larger labor force to develop the colonies in the areas of agriculture and mining. This was important for the economic future of the Americas and Europe. African people were also an easy target for enslavement because Europeans viewed other ethnic groups as inferior, especially black people. The trade benefited the Europeans, the African slave traders, and the colonists in the Americas. The Europeans wanted cotton, tobacco, rum, molasses, and sugar from the colonies.

They were able to barter for Africans and then trade them to the colonists for these commodities. The African slave traders received European goods such as textiles, alcohol, horses, and guns in return. Africans were often enslaved in their own country because of their status. According to Jennifer Scott (1998), if a person had committed a crime, were prisoners of war, or had a debt that was unpaid, then they could become a slave. It was these people that the traders sold to the Europeans.

The colonists wanted slaves because they needed a strong labor force to grow cotton, rice, tobacco, sugar, and other crops. Mining of gold and silver was also hard and tedious work. The use of slaves was cheap and allowed the colonists to produce a greater quantity of their products. According to Eric Williams (1970), "The reason [for negro slavery] was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor." However, Claudia Ferguson explains that Williams' reference was limited to the New World.

It excluded prior enslavement of Africans by Europeans in Sicily, Spain, Portugal, and the Eastern Atlantic Islands. Ferguson (2008) suggested that

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from the very beginning of the trade, the fabricators of European conscience had evoked racist theology and hilltop's to normalize the trade by correlating " Negro" or " Ethiopians" with sin and slavery. Ferguson goes on to say, that in order to enslave African peoples, it was necessary to euthanize them and demonic them. Howard Zinc (2009) argued that racism towards the African people began before the slave trade's beginning in 1600.

Before Africans were associated with the slave trade, the color black was literally and symbolically distasteful to Europeans. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, before 1 600, it was defined as: " Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant. Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horribly wicked, etc. " And in Elizabethan poetry, the color white was often used to symbolize beauty and peace. Ferguson agreed with Zinc in that racism towards the Africans began before the slave trade.

Ferguson conveys the story of the destruction of the island Philae and the shrine of Isis, a black goddess venerated around the Mediterranean world, by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in 540 CE. Ferguson (2008) stated, " the destruction of Philae climaxed the growing trend in the early Christian era to euthanize, denigrate, and demote black Africans to a servile category. " Christianity and the Catholic Church played an ample role in the Atlantic Slave Trade because it promoted and preached racism. David Meager (2007) suggested that the Christians thought they had the right as God's chosen people to enslave ' inferior' nations.

Robert Dabbed (1853) stated, " while we believe that ' God made of one blood all nations of men to dwell under the whole heavens, ' we know that

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the African has become, according to a well-known law of unnatural history, by the manifold influences of the ages, a different, fixed species of the race, separated from the white man by traits bodily, mental and moral, almost rigid and permanent as those of genus (puppy-353). " According to Dabbed, it was God's natural order that ' superior races should enslave ' inferior' races for their own spiritual, moral and material good, and for the social stability Of everybody else.

The church justified slavery by calling black people heathens and proclaiming that they were helping them to have a better life by enslaving them. Christians were desensitizing to the belief that all people are equal and have free will. According to Dabbed, after slaves were transported to the loonies, they ate more meat, wore better clothing, and lived in better houses than their ancestors did. Papal intervention attempted to relieve the conscience of Christian traders liberating any guilt or doubts concerning the morality of their undertaking.

Ferguson (2008) gave an example of how the church normalized the slave trade by naming the slave ships after important icons in Christianity such as the Solomon, The Lord, and the Madder De Adios. Ferguson also explained that slave plantations were given similar names, especially in colonies with strong Catholic connections. This made slave traders and owners believe that they ere acting in the name of the church and that therefore it was kosher. As early as the 15th century, England passed from raising sheep and producing wool, an agricultural activity, to manufacturing cloth. This signaled the beginning of capitalist production.

According to Abdul Alkali (1990), it is in capitalist production that the basic cause of the slave trade is located. Alkali goes on to say that commerce and trade kept expanding especially overseas, and therefore more and more goods were needed. Machines were invented to speed up production causing large-scale industries to form, which in turn developed steam and watchtower. Alkali argued that the slave trade was caused by the development of capitalism and also made an important contribution to the continued development of capitalism. If the lands colonized in the Americas were to yield a profit, labor was needed.

It was to Africa and the slave trade that Europe turned to in order to obtain the labor needed in the Americas. The origin of black slavery, according to Eric Williams (1944), " can be expressed in three words: in the Caribbean, Sugar, on the mainland, Tobacco and Cotton. " According to Zinc (2009), slavery grew as the plantation system grew. The reason is easily traceable to something other than natural racial distaste: the number of arriving whites, whether free or indentured servants, was not enough to meet the need of the plantations. By 1700, in Virginia, there were 6,000 slaves, one-twelfth of the population.

By 1763, there were 170,000 slaves, about half of the population. Williams points out, " The features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice [teeth], his ' subhuman' characteristics so widely pleaded, were only later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best. " Abdul Alkali (1990) agreed with Williams by suggesting that racism was an

elaborate set of lies and distortions branding black people as inherently inferior that was developed to facilitate economic profiteering Of the slaves by the capitalists.

In addition to supplying an all important labor force for the development of the Americas, the slave trade itself yielded large profits. One influential mercantilism in the 18th century said slaves were ‘ the fundamental prop and support” of the English colonies. Another described the slave trade as “ the iris principle and foundation of all the rest, the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion. The slave trade not only provided the population of workers for the plantations and mines of the New World, but it also made big profits for both the slave traders and those who provided them with goods and services. Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery* gives many examples of the slave buyers making double their money in profits on the sales of slaves. Alkali (1990) suggested that the slave trade was perhaps the most abundant source of quick and substantial profits during this time in story.