

History of slavery



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The apparent contradiction of slavery's development in America, the world's first democratic republic, is certainly difficult to understand, especially living in times where slavery is perceived as the most heinous moral crime.

Although we see democracy as a political environment in which human beings have equal say in the direction of their state, the ideological positions of many early Americans prevented them from seeing slaves as human beings at all. Although one should not excuse the men and women who started slavery in the colonies based on cultural relativism, one also should not ignore the causes of slavery in the first place. First, understanding the origins of slavery is important for preventing the institution from ever returning. Second, it is important to scholars to understand the social and economic conditions of the early English colonies, and the perspective of slaves (and slaveholders) provides an excellent perspective on that history. According to one account, " Research has shown that, despite enormous cruelties, slavery was a profitable labor system" (Norton, Sheriff and Katzman 232). Common belief in our day is that slavery itself began as an expression of racist ideologies against the African continent. However, it seems more likely that slavery took its origins in the English colonies with economic factors and the growing capitalist ideology sweeping across Europe and her farthest outposts. Slavery as consisting of a White master and a Black slave truly began in 1441 when a Portuguese ship returned to Portugal with ten African slaves. While slavery already existed on the continent of Africa, this kind of subjugation was vastly different from the kind that would develop on the American continent. Colonization of the Americas increased in strength in the early 1600s, with the first permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. Other colonies along the eastern seaboard of

the continent progressed as well. For the most part, the colonists' relations with the native populations turned hostile by the middle of the century, creating numerous problems for the English settlers in their attempt to continue their colonization of the east coast. With forest, farm, and seafaring labor to be done, colonists needed a sustainable work force to accomplish their goals and to survive. By the 1620s and 1630s three groups were already being contemplated as prospective workers: other Europeans, indigenous Americans, and West Africans. In 1619, the first importation of the African captives came upon the American shores. Like the poor Englishmen brought to the country as indentured servants, Africans were promised freedom after several years of labor. However, this promise soon faded and the majority of the new African slaves were kept in slavery for their entire lives. Control over the captive population became a significant issue for whites as rebellion and fear of rebellion spread. Slavery was defended in a variety of ways by some southerners, who often relied on practical arguments to support the continued practice of slavery. For instance, "in 1845 James Henry Hammond argued that slaveholding was a matter of property rights, protected by the Constitution because slaves were legal property" (Norton, Sheriff and Katzman 234). Other defenders of slaveholding argued because of a hierarchical value of nature as prescribed by nature or God, thus bringing together elements of religion and racism. Moreover, because tradition played such a large role in Southern culture, slaveholders stood resistant to change even on the face of civil war. The issue of slavery was most pressing in the thirty years leading up to the American Civil War, as Thomas R. Dew's *Abolition of Negro Slavery* sparked a national debate, and a slew of proslavery defenses. This natural law

approach to defending the existence of institutional slavery was countered by abolitionist movements primarily in the Northern states, who disputed the South's claim that not only was slavery a "necessarily evil" but a "positive good" (Norton, Sheriff and Katzman 233). All of this, however, came about because slavery was an instrumental part of the South's system of commerce, built over the course of hundreds of years. Had another race been chosen as the primary slave workforce, the rhetoric would have been no different. Bibliography Norton, Mary Beth, et al. *A People & A Nation: A History of the United States to 1877*. Brief 8th. 1 vols. New York: Cengage Learning, 2008.