

# History of Slavery

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## Hands of a Slave

We Present Here for your Research and Perusal, an Overview of the History of Slavery. We Present this Material in Five Parts:

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## The Slave Trade: Early Roots in Britain

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In 1562 John Hawkins, an English navigator, seeing the want of slaves in the West Indies, determined to enter upon the piratical traffic. Several London gentlemen contributed funds liberally for the enterprise. Three ships were provided, and with these and 100 men Hawkins sailed to the coast of Guinea, where, by bribery, deception, treachery, and force, he procured at least 300 negroes and sold them to the Spaniards in Hispaniola, or Santo Domingo, and returned to England with a rich freight of pearls, sugar, and ginger. The nation was shocked by the barbarous traffic, and the Queen (Elizabeth) declared to Hawkins that, "if any of the Africans were carried away without their own consent, it would be detestable, and call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers." He satisfied the Queen and continued the traffic, pretending that it was for the good of the souls of the Africans, as it introduced them to Christianity and civilization.

Already negro slaves had been introduced by the Spaniards into the West Indies. They first enslaved the natives, but these were unequal to the required toil, and they were soon almost extinguished by hard labor and cruelty. Charles V. of Spain granted a license to a Fleming to import 4,000 negroes annually into the West Indies. He sold his license to Genoese merchants, who began a regular trade in human beings between Africa and the West Indies. These were found to thrive where the native laborers died. The benevolent Las Casas and others favored the system as a means for saving the Indian tribes from destruction; and the trade was going on briskly when the English, under the influence of Hawkins, engaged in it in 1562. Ten years before a few negroes had been sold in England, and it is said that Queen Elizabeth's scruples were so far removed that she shared in the profits of the traffic carried on by Englishmen. The Stuart kings of England chartered companies for the trade; and Charles II. and his brother James were members of one of them.

After the revolution of 1688 the trade was thrown open, and in 1713 an English company obtained the privilege of supplying the Spanish colonies in America, South and Central, for thirty years, stipulating to deliver 144,000 negro slaves within that period. One quarter of the stock of the company was taken by King Philip V. of Spain, and Queen Anne of England reserved for herself the other quarter. So the two monarchs became great slave-dealers.

## **Slavery Comes to America**

The first slaves were introduced into the English-American colonies by a Dutch trader, who, in 1619, sold twenty of them to the settlers at Jamestown, Va. After that the trade between North America and Africa was carried on quite vigorously; but some of the colonies remonstrated, and in the Continental Congress, and also in the public mind, there was a strong desire evinced to abolish the slave-trade. Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick were banished from the colony of Massachusetts, in 1658, under penalty of death if they should return. Their crime was the embracing of the principles and mode of worship of the Quakers. Their two children remained behind in extreme poverty. They were fined for non-attendance upon the public worship carried on by their

persecutors. The magistrates insisted that the fine must be paid, and passed the following order: "Whereas, Daniel Southwick and Provided Southwick, son and daughter of Lawrence Southwick, absenting themselves from the public ordinances, having been fined by the courts of Salem and Ipswich, pretending they have no estates, and resolving not to work, the court, upon perusal of a law which was made upon account of debts, in what should be done for the satisfaction of the fines, resolves, that the treasurers of the several counties are and shall be fully empowered to sell said persons to any of the English natives at Virginia or Barbadoes to answer the said fines." Endicott, it is said, urged the execution of the measure with vehemence; but, to the honor of the marine service, not a sea-captain in the port of Boston could be induced to become a slave-dealer to please the General Court. They were spared the usual brutal whipping of contumacious persons as a special mark of humanity.

In 1662 the Virginia Assembly passed a law that children should be held, bond or free, "according to the condition of the mother." This was to meet the case of mulatto children, born of black mothers, in the colony. It was thought right to hold heathen Africans in slavery; but, as mulattoes must be part Christians, a knotty question came up, for the English law in relation to serfdom declared the condition of the child must be determined by that of the father. The Virginia law opposed this doctrine in favor of the slave-holders. Some of the negroes brought into Virginia were converted to Christianity and baptized. The question was raised, "Is it lawful to hold Christians as slaves?" The General Assembly came to the relief of the slave-holders by enacting a law that slaves, though converted and baptized, should not therefore become free. It was also enacted that killing a slave by his master by "extreme correction" should not be esteemed a felony, since it might not be presumed that "malice prepense" would "induce any man to destroy his own estate." It was also enacted, as an evasion of the statute prohibiting the holding of Indians as slaves, "that all servants, not being Christians, imported by shipping, shall be slaves for life." Indian slaves, under this law, were imported from New England and the West Indies. Freed slaves were then subjected to civil disabilities.



## **A COLONIAL SLAVE-MARKET IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.**

In 1663 the Maryland legislature enacted a law that " all negroes and other slaves within the province, and all negroes and other slaves to be thereafter imported into the province, should serve during life; and all children born of any negro should be slaves, as their fathers were, for the term of their lives." The same law recited that " divers free-born English-women, forgetful of their free condition, and to the disgrace of the nation, did intermarry with negro slaves," and it was enacted for deterring from such " shameful matches " that, during their husbands' lives, white women so intermarrying should be servants to the masters of their husbands, and that the issue of such marriages should be slaves for life.

### **Intermarriage Between Slave and Free**

In 1681 the legislature of Maryland passed a new act to remedy the evils of intermarrying of whites and blacks. The preamble recited that such matches were often brought about by the instigation or connivance of the master or mistress, who took advantage of the former law to prolong the servitude of their white feminine servants, and at the same time to raise up a brood of mulatto slaves. The new law enacted that all white feminine servants intermarrying with negro slaves were free, at once, after the nuptials, and their children also; and that the minister celebrating and the master or mistress promoting or conniving at such marriages were subjected to a fine of 10,000 pounds of tobacco.

### **Rules for Slaves**

In 1682 the slave code of Virginia received additions. It was enacted that runaways who refused to be arrested might be lawfully killed. Slaves were forbidden to carry arms, offensive or defensive, or to go off the plantations of their masters without a written pass, or to lift a hand

against a Christian, even in self-defense. The condition of slavery was imposed upon all servants, whether " negroes, Moors, mulattoes, or Indians, brought into the colony by sea or land, whether converted to Christianity or not, provided they were not of Christian parentage or country, or, if Turks or Moors, in amity with his Majesty." Nearly a century afterwards Virginia tried to suppress the traffic in African slaves, and in 1761 it was proposed in her legislature to suppress the importation of Africans by levying a prohibitory duty. Danger to the political interest of that colony was foreboded by her wisest men in the continuance of the trade. An act for levying the tax was passed by the Assembly, but in England it met the fate of similar bills from other colonies to suppress the nefarious traffic. It was sent back with a veto.

## **King George Orders That Slavery NOT be Abolished in the Colonies**

The King in council, on Dec. 10, 1770, issued an instruction, under his own hand, commanding the governor of Virginia, " upon pain of the highest displeasure, to assent to no law by which the importation of slaves should be in any respect prohibited or obstructed." In 1772 the Virginia Assembly earnestly discussed the question, " How shall we get rid of the great evil?" Jefferson, Henry, Lee, and other leading men anxiously desired to rid the colony of it. " The interest of the country," it was said, " manifestly requires the total expulsion of them." The Assembly finally resolved to address the King himself on the subject, who, in council, had compelled the toleration of the traffic, They pleaded with him to remove all restraints upon their efforts to stop the importation of slaves, which they called " a very pernicious commerce." In this matter Virginia represented the sentiments of all the colonies, and the King knew it; but the monarch " stood in the path of humanity and made himself the pillar of the colonial slave-trade." Ashamed to reject the earnest and solemn appeal of the Virginians, he evaded a reply. The conduct of the King caused Jefferson to write as follows in his first draft of the Declaration of Independence: "He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, capturing and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur a miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce." This paragraph was stricken out of the Declaration of Independence before the committee submitted it to a vote of the Congress.

## **Rationalizations for Slavery**

The unwise regulations of the trustees of Georgia, which crushed incentives to industry and thrift, and other causes which exist in all new settlements, made that colony languish. The settlers saw the prosperity of their neighbors in South Carolina, and attributed the difference to the positive prohibition of slavery in Georgia. This became their leading

grievance, and even Whitefield advocated the introduction of slavery, under the old (and later) pretence of propagating, in that way, Christianity among the heathen Africans. Habersham, too, advocated the introduction. " Many of the poor slaves in America," he wrote, " have already been made freemen of the heavenly Jerusalem." The Germans were assured by their friends in Germany of its harmlessness. Word came to them in 1749: " If you take slaves in faith and with the intent of conducting them to Christ, the action will not be a sin, but may prove a benediction." So it was that avarice subdued conscience. Already slaves had been introduced into Georgia from South Carolina as hired servants, under indentures for life, or for ninety-nine years; and at Savannah the continual toast was, " The one thing needful," which meant negro slaves. Leading men among the Scotch and Germans who opposed the introduction of slavery were threatened and persecuted. Under great pressure, the trustees yielded, and slavery was introduced on the condition that all masters should be obliged to compel the negroes to "attend, at some time on the Lord's day, for instruction in the Christian religion." In 1752 the charter was surrendered to the crown, the colony had all the privileges accorded to others, and flourished.



**A Slave Auction in New Orleans**

To completely enslave the English-American colonies, the British Parliament, in 1750, gave liberty to trade in negroes, as slaves, to and from any part of Africa between Sallee, in South Barbary, and the Cape of Good Hope, to all the subjects of the King of England. This was designed to fill the colonies with slaves, who should neither trouble Great Britain with fears of encouraging political independence nor compete with their industry with British workshops; neither would they leave their employers the entire security that might enable them to prepare a revolt.

## **Slavery Illegal in Britain**

James Somerset, a negro slave of James Stewart, was taken from Virginia to England, where he refused to serve his master any longer. Stewart caused him to be arrested and put on board a vessel to be conveyed to Jamaica. Being brought before Chief-Justice Mansfield on a writ of habeas corpus (December, 1771), his case was referred to the full court, where it was argued for the slave by the great philanthropist, Granville Sharp. The decision would affect the estimated number of 14,000 slaves then with their masters in England, involving a loss to their owners of \$3,500,000. After a careful judicial investigation of the subject in its legal aspects, Chief-Justice Mansfield gave the decision of the court that slavery was contrary to the laws of England—that slavery could not exist there. " Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from the decision," he said, " I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England, and therefore the black must be discharged."



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