

INTRODUCTION

Slavery in America began when the first African slaves were brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, to aid in the production of such lucrative crops as tobacco. Slavery was practiced throughout the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and African-American slaves helped build the economic foundations of the new nation. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 solidified the central importance of slavery to the South's economy. By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion, along with a growing abolition movement in the North, would provoke a great debate over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the bloody American Civil War (1861-65). Though the Union victory freed the nation's 4 million slaves, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history, from the tumultuous years of Reconstruction (1865-77) to the civil rights movement that emerged in the 1960s, a century after emancipation.

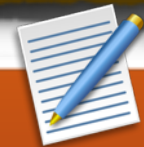
FOUNDATIONS OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA

In the early 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more plentiful labor source than indentured servants (who were mostly poorer Europeans). After 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans ashore at the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, slavery spread throughout the American colonies. Though it is impossible to give accurate figures, some historians have estimated that 6 to 7 million slaves were imported to the New World during the 18th century alone, depriving the African continent of some of its healthiest and ablest men and women.

Did You Know?

One of the first martyrs to the cause of American patriotism was Crispus Attucks, a former slave who was killed by British soldiers during the Boston Massacre of 1770. Some 5,000 black soldiers and sailors fought on the American side during the War of Independence.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, black slaves worked mainly on the tobacco, rice and indigo plantations of the southern coast. After the American Revolution (1775-83), many colonists (particularly in the North, where slavery was relatively unimportant to the economy) began to link the oppression of black slaves to their own oppression by the British, and to call for slavery's abolition. After the war's end, however, the new U.S. Constitution tacitly acknowledged the institution, counting each slave as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of taxation and representation in Congress and guaranteeing the right to repossess any "person held to service or labor" (an obvious euphemism for slavery).



INTRODUCTION

1. When did slavery begin in America?
2. How long did it last?
3. What happened in the mid-19th century?
4. What was the consequence of that?
5. How many slaves were freed?

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6. Why did European settlers want slaves?
7. What is an « indentured servant? »
8. How many African slaves were imported to America in the 18th century?
9. Who wanted to abolish slavery? Why?

