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HCOM 346

24 October 2013

**Slavery in the Americas**

Africa was home to important empires that shaped their history, such as Ghana and Mali. Africans began trading with Arabs and some European countries; they were advanced societies during the years of each empire. The different empires were able to avoid being conquered by outsiders; they had total control of their people and a great military system. Their lives drastically changed when the Portuguese and other Europeans arrived in their territory. Both crowns, the Spanish and Portuguese, had conquered what now is known as Latin-America and the Caribbean. The enslaved Native American population had quickly decreased, so these Europeans turned to Africa to substitute their slaves. Africans were forcibly brought to the Caribbean and the Americas; since their captured, in their native tribes, their lives completely changed. Most of the Africans did not know the reason why they were captured; they got to find out once they stepped on American soil.

The Africans were used of seeing slavery, for they had slaves before the Europeans got there. Slaves in Africa were treated differently; they had some rights, not like in the Americas. African slaves, in their country, were like family members with their masters. They were treated the same way that the master’s children were treated; they were even called the same, “nleke”. In some case, slaves were even allowed to own their own property. Although slavery existed in their towns, it was very different to be a slave of a foreigner.

At the arrival of the Europeans, Africans were enslaved, put into ships, and began their way to America through the Middle Passage. The Europeans would take, mainly, young strong people to put them to work in the New World. It would have been impossible to capture African tribes without the help of other Africans; Africans traded their own people. During the slave trade, some Africans hold very important job positions that were key to the transportation of slaves; for example, the Canoemen that used their canoes to transport slaves to the European ships. At their captured, Africans were put all together; there was no distinction between slaves. In the article, The African Roots of Colonial America, the author explains, “Slave traders cared little whether the captives were slaves, free artisans, or nobility like Anta, who was descended from the founder of the Jolof Empire whose large family had provided generations of rulers.” In the ship, naked women and men were put together; there, it did not matter what social position they held before the capture. Captives had to share the limited space that the ship provided, with hundreds of other people. The heat made it almost impossible for slaves to breath, and the air was contaminated with horrific scent. According to the article, The Middle Passage: An Eyewitness Account, “This produced copious perspirations, that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchase.” The emotional situation was also intolerable, for children were suffocated and dying adults were kept around. Many slaves died in the Middle Passage, some because of the unhealthy environment and by committing suicide.

When Africans arrived to the Americas, they were stripped from their religion, language and culture. Their new masters imposed their religion; most of the time they were converted to Christianity and their names were changed. They were introduced to the bible and some of them even learned to read it. Although it was prohibited to practice their native religion, the slaves that were Christianized added some important elements from their religion to the one that they were imposed to. Masters would manipulate religion to justify slavery; they argued that the New Testament provided that evidence. Negroes used religion as a motivation to continue with their daily lives. According to the article *The Religion of the Slaves, “*In the crowds that attended the revivals and camp meetings there were numbers of Negroes who found in the fiery message of salvation a hope and a prospect of escape from their earthly woes” (16). Slaves thought about the after-life and hoped they would be compensated for all the sufferings on earth. Not only did they have to change their religion, but also their language. It was forbidden, for Africans, to use their native language. In most cases people from the same tribe were not placed in the same plantation, this strategy was used to enable communication between slaves. Even if they were to speak the same language, they were forced to learn English to communicate with the master. In the same article it is mentioned, “It was necessary to acquire some knowledge of the language of whites for communication. Any attempt on the part of the slaves to preserve or use their native language was discouraged or prohibited” (11). Without the language, it was almost impossible to retain any cultural values, although some were kept. The Africans and their new generations in the United States created a very unique culture; the imported slaves assimilated to the new culture and incorporated components of their native culture. Even though they were stripped from their culture, language and religion, they managed to keep up with their fate. They were able to create a distinctive new way of life, combining the old and new traditions.

Slaves were under the supremacy of the whites, causing them to be victims of inhumane treatment. The article, *The Negro as Non-American: Some Backgrounds*, acknowledges, “However, the African who was unfortunate enough to find himself on some fast clipper ship on the New World was not even accorded membership of the human race” (2). They were just part of a rich white man’s property. If been captured and stripped from cultural values was not enough trauma, slaves were oblige to work arduously in a foreign country for several generations. In the United States, like in most of Latin America, Negroes were the backbone of the economy. Although, economically, they were the most important people in the country, they were not treated as humans. Slaves worked for many hours every day, with the exception of Sundays. Many times, they would get only a few hours of sleep and food was scarce. Workers slept on the floor, without blankets, and in a very crowded room. A big plate of food was shared among many people. If slaves were unsatisfied with the food, they were whipped; whipping was used to set an example of not to protest about the food. Year-round, there was work for these people; even on extreme temperatures, workers had to do their job. If for some reason they were unable to do their job properly, slaves were punished. Everyone had to work, except for really young children, even old people. Clothes were distributed once a year, but only to the workers because children who were unable to work did not get anything. Frederick Douglas narrates:

Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes: the whole of which could not have cost more than seven dollars… The children unable to work in the field had neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trousers, given to them; their clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts per year. (Douglas, 8)

Not even because they worked so hard were lucky enough to receive the basic necessities to survive. The supremacy that the whites had, made slaves inferior of the human race.

Negroes were not just victims of horrific working conditions; they also had to face the harassment of their superiors and the separation of their families. If an overseer was not satisfied with a slave’s job, that slave would be harassed and many times whipped. Whipping was very common; it was used as a way to control slaves. In reality, whites did not have to have a special reason to whip a slave; any slave would be whipped at any given moment for an absurd reason. Women were sexually abused by the overseers and even by their masters. In case a child was produced with the raping, he or she was never recognized by the father. Douglas points out, “My father was a white man… the opinion was also whispered that my master was my father… My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant- before I knew her as my mother” (Douglas, 2). Many slaves were the sons and daughters of their masters, like in the case of Frederick Douglas. Children were not allowed to grow up with their mothers, they were separated at birth; in many cases they did not even know who their mothers were. Old slaves, who were unable to work in the fields, were in charge of raising the children. In many cases, slaves would be sold to other masters, so the family ties were destroyed. If a slave was unable to work, they would be sent out to a place where the master did not have to spend any money on them.

Under these inhumane circumstances, many slaves secretly resisted the oppression. Many slaves figured that they were the ones that produced the economic status for their masters, so they would work slowly and at times they would completely stop their task. They would also break tools and even kill animals; all this was done to hurt the economy of their masters. Even though education was prohibited, some slaves would gather to get some education. Many revolts took place, though not so many were reported. Maybe they were not reported because the master did not want to lose prestige. Others were brave enough to make up a plan to escape from slavery. The ones that were able to escape dedicated their lives to help others gained their freedom, such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas. The ex-slaves invented ways, like the Underground Railroad, to help their enslaved brothers escape the misery.

In conclusion, Africans were forced to leave their native homes to come and work for a foreign country. The history of the powerful civilizations in Africa was thrashed by the Europeans, when they begin taking its people. Although the slaves were stripped from their identity, they were able to survive the inhumane treatment and retain some aspects of their African cultures.

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