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True Beginnings of Slavery

When you think of Slavery, what are the first things that come to your mind? No doubt, you think of slave ships, Africa, African Americans, extreme brutality, and innocent deaths just to name a few. The slave trade of African Americans just happens to be the most discussed in history, however, slavery of Africans were not the only nor the first enslaved people in American History. The first were actually the Native Americans. They were enslaved by early settlers and those seeking to colonize the New World, also known as America. However, there are many similarities between the slave trade of African people and the Native Americans.

Hollywood, Disney, and most history books only teach the nice parts relating to the Native Americans. Think about Pocahontas, John Smith, Christopher Columbus, and old Westerns. They only tell of how unfriendly was to each other but then eventually, they all became best friends and lived happily ever after. The history books fail to mention how Natives were enslaved and brutally murdered until the majority of them were extinct. The settlers were not handy or skilled enough to fertilize the lands to produce food nor could they navigate the land of which they had never been to. So in efforts to gain, they made the Natives slaves to force them into growing food and extorted them for their resources. (Carpenter 33)

Bartolome De Las Casas was one of the few advocates for Native American rights during the early 1400’s. (Gustafson 66) Las Casas was a soldier who was able to observe the horrible treatment on the Indians by American colonizers, often in the name of Christianity, according to an entry wrote by Las Casas. Bartolome witnessed extreme cruelty to the Indians by Spaniards, he stated. The Christians would enter into the villages and kill women, men, and children. (Las Casas) he quoted “*I myself that once, four, or five lords and men of high rank we burned on grates, the executioner that was burning them sewed their mouths shut with sticks so they could make no sounds of pain.”)* (Las Casas) Las Casas being a man in strong faith knew that these acts were not acts of true Christians, so he campaigned to institute the improvement of relationships between American colonizers and Indians. (Gustafon 67) Once colonizers killed off most or all of the Indians, there was no one else to harvest food for them, so they resorted to finding more slaves.

Bartolome suggested that instead of torturing and enslaving Indians, colonizers should search for other slaves, even proposing to enslave Africans to replace the Natives. (Gustafson 67) This is exactly what the settlers did once they completed the genocide of the Indians. Spaniards would come to African Countries and begin the trade of humans for goods, promising them to be cleared from debts but only to enslave them. (Hughes) The Africans did not take kindly to the Europeans and Spaniards since they were being mistreated. (Hughes 329) During the African slave trade families were split up. Once on plantations, if the Negro slaves left the limits or did some other slight fault, they were given a beating of fifty strokes even having firebrands to parts of their body. (Hughes 314) This is the same way they did Native American’s. According to Bartolome he wrote, colonizers would make Indians swim to the bottom of the sea searching for pearls, and if they rested too long they were beaten and even killed. (Las Casas) William Byam was appalled by the cruel treatment of the Negro slaves, just as Bartolome, however, he wasn’t completely opposed as he had slaves himself. (Hughes 313)

In conclusion, both of these race of these people were mistreated. The Dominant, which were the American colonizers from Spain, England, France, and some other countries, used extreme force to gain riches. It is as if they made a career out of exploiting the innocent. Once they depleted the population of Native Americans, they had no other choice but to Africans, since similar to the Indians they knew how to harvest crops to produce food. The extreme brutality of the Native Americans and Africans was senseless and cruel. These innocent people where fooled into slavery by false hopes of riches or friendships. As you can see, they settlers piggy backed off of what was done first to the Native Americans, and just did it to the Africans. On the contrary to what was taught to us, slave trade begin as early as the 1400’s. History will only teach us what they want us to know. I was extremely sick to my stomach and distraught by reading some of the details. This history will forever be a part of America and we should never forget it.

Works Cited

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