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U.S. Labor and Work before the End of Reconstruction

Paper 1 Final Draft

3/2/2017

From Indigenous servitude to racially based slavery system

The European triumph of the Americas attracted many Europeans to settle and industrialize to acquire wealth. The plenitude of assets and opportunity of gaining wealth was a key reason for European settlement in the Americas. Some of the resources included gold, silver, and crops which ultimately started labor in the Americas. As Europeans took control over the Native American terrains, they started to cultivate plantations because the yields gave incredible benefits. The securing of new grounds incited work needs because the crops required a large measure of caretaking. Europeans started the work in the Americas because the market of the yields and different assets requested it. Europeans declined to do work on the grounds they had, so they constrained the indigenous individuals of the Americas to work for them. Despite constraining work upon the Natives, such form of coerced labor was short-lived due to diseases which many Natives fell victim to. Religious flexibility, rich products, and new opportunity influenced many Europeans to settle in the North Americas. Such attractions of the new land influenced Europeans to pay their fare across the Atlantic by embarking on a contract with masters who required labor for a certain period of time, which soon to came known as Indigenous servitude. Before slavery indigenous servitude was a principle form of labor. However, there were numerous drawbacks to it as not many contracts were being completed with groups of rebellious farmers emerging. Landowners, in order to protect their superior status, shifted their strategy for maintaining dominance. They deserted their dependence on indentured servants for the importation of the black slaves. This made way for the African slave exchange otherwise called the Triangular trade as this helped solve the shortage of labor.

In the early 1700s, the demand for labor was rapidly increasing due to the amount of caretaking that plantations required. The uprising of plantation economy induced landowners to search for servants and slaves who would work on their lands. Therefore, Europeans started to export, obligated workers, and slaves to the Americas. Obligated workers comprised of poor Europeans and Africans who needed to leave their nation because of contentions and were not able to pay for their voyage so thusly they made concurrences with landowners and ship skippers to work for them. However, in the late 1670s, the popularity of the Indigenous servitude began to decline with the emergence of angry farmers and laborers because farmers were treated with injustice and instability (Book 64). This led to a turning point in servitude which became known as Bacon’s Rebellion. It was a crucial movement led by Nathaniel Bacon and consisted of lower class whites and blacks who were infuriated with plantation owners as they were promised lands and freedom after their working period was fulfilled. When they did not receive what was promised, revolts broke out and Jamestown was burnt to the ground. The downfall of indentured servitude was heavily influenced by the rebellion which was a central movement of class identity. Following Bacon’s Rebellion around 1676, landowners began to transition towards African slavery due to the attributes provided by them. Rather than bringing in English slaves from the West Indies, who will probably be acquainted with European dialect and culture, numerous more slaves were brought from Africa. For landowners, these slaves were far less demanding to control and far more averse to an alliance with poor whites. “Initially, the Chesapeake had been what historians call a “society with slaves”, but by early 1700s it was transformed into a slave society” (Book 64). In the early 1700s, Slavery became a significant part of the labor in the United States because landowners saw slavery as a way to make a maximum profit without having to pay almost nothing in return. Landowners treated their slaves as property and made them work long hours so they could make more money. This change in Chesapeake region, set a pattern for other southern colonies as they too expanded.

Over the first few decades of 1700s, number of African slaves brought to Americas increased dramatically. Some of the factors include how Europeans discovered that black slaves could be purchased at a low cost. Thus, the enslavement of blacks grew rapidly. Traditionally, Englishmen were only allowed to enslave non-Christian people, and African and Indians were the perfect ones to fit this definition. Due to his fact But landowners, started to worry, what if these slaves converted to Christianity or learned English, then they can one day form against us. This was the starting point of the racially based slavery in Americas. “In early 1700s, the noun slave become a synonymous to the people commonly called “Indians”, “Negroes”, “mulattoes”, and “mustizoes” (South Carolina Slave Code Exert 1). In the 1740s, South Carolina’s Slave Code was published to control the population of enslaved people and gave landowners more power over slaves. The Code was taken in action because the demand for work was a major issue as the accessibility of land made assembling and keeping a work drive difficult. People who could make a living for themselves from the land had little reason to work for others. After the Code was published, the plantations owners preferred slaves over indigenous servitude, as it gave them significant amount of power over them. “The Code suggested that all slaves, African, Indian, or Mulattoes who are now or might now be in master’s province are to be remain absolute slaves forever hereafter” (South Carolina Slave Code). Also the code stated that a child of a slave mother would also be considered as slaves. This made plantation owners greedier, and they started buying more and more slaves; and majority of the slaves were Africans because they were being exported from Europe to Americas in thousands, and they were also not Christians. They plantations owners saw this as a way to make more money without have to give much in return. “Negro” slaves were the property of their owners to do with as they preferred. This code of law is striking in its awful detail, which affirms the terrible status of fellow human beings, the slave. These steps made slavery much worse than initially expected and encouraged more heinous acts, such as whipping and beating, toward slaves. Because of this, slaves were treated as property instead of human and were not given the same rights as white Americans. Furthermore, slaves who get caught doing protest or wrongdoing of any kind would attract punishment equal to treason or death. In addition to that, any slaves that were ever found outside of their work zone without white’s consent, they could be consider as a run away which could be punishable by death. “David George, who was born into slavery, was whipped by his owners many times on the naked skin, and was forced to saw his brother, mother, and sister being tortured for running away” (Book 64). This emphasizes how tight grip landowners have on slaves. This system of labor was thoroughly transformed into racially based slavery. The debased status of Africans was legitimized on the ground that Negroes, similar to the Indians, were an uncivilized lesser race, and the supremacy of white played a huge role in the enslavement of Africans.

Despite the advantages of African slavery that made plantation owners wealthier, many blacks faced harsh and unfair treatment by the White landowners. Over the years, slavery became harsher which led to unfair rights and social status in the society because of skin color. Despite the advantages of African slavery, many blacks faced harsh and unfair treatment by the White landowners. The slaves were not allowed to read or write because if slaves becomes more educated they might resist slavery. In fact, if a slave was found reading or writing there were punished harshly because if the government found out that a slave was reading his owner would be fined $100 (South Carolina Slave Code). Also in the courts, slaves were not given the same rights as white. They were not allowed to accuse any white person of anything. A case accuses of any crime against white men or women was doomed immediately. Slaves were also not authorized to give testimony according to the code. Therefore, the slave’s side of the story could never be told in the court. Which gave white slave owners more power over their slaves because anything they do to the slaves will never stand against them. In addition to this, slaves did not have any rights to carry weapons on them. A slave seen with any kind of, dangerous or not, weapon will be forced to give it up or could get killed on sight (South Carolina Slave Code). The court gave full rights to any master to do their duty and prevent any danger that could occur from armed slaves.

All in all, many components went into the framing of a racially based bondage forced in North America. Englander’s considerable interest for work brought slaves to Americas from Europe as a form of cheap labor. The obligated workers began to rebel against the proprietors as they were dealt with unjustifiably and needed to live in unpleasant conditions and the liberated hirelings likewise brought about issues where they must be given land to which to live on. Revolts, for example, Bacon's defiance and taking accommodate the free obligated workers after their agreements are done considered into having a racially based subjugation in the Americas. African slave revolts frightened the elites which in the end prompted to laws making them go from Indentured servants to Property forever. Every one of these elements prompted to subjection in America with interest for work being the best as this was the begin of everything. Everything to come and negative impacts as yet being felt today began from Europeans triumph of the Americas and the requirement for work.

Works Cited

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