# From First Contact to the Civil War

The first group of slaves captured from Africa arrived in America in 1619 after being captured by the Dutch. This formed the genesis of the issue of slavery which later grew to become a big tragedy to the African communities living in the continent. Able bodied men and women were captured, separated from their families and shipped off to the America. Records show that the first group of slaves from Africa was brought to Jamestown in North America. The slaves had been brought in to work on tobacco plantations (Logue, 1996). The vice of slavery later spread into other American colonies as the need for cheap labor in economic activities such as farming increased. Later in the 19th century, proponents of human rights led a campaign on the abolishment of slavery. The result was the civil war which lasted for 4 years. This study looks at the survival of the African slaves through the slavery and the civil war as greatly influenced by the civil war. The paper also reviews the correlation between the African culture and the aspects that were of great influence during the slavery period.

Despite the fact that slavery meant that the captured Africans were kept in bondage, it did very little to keep them passive to their origin. They never lost their African identity and had very little attachment to their colonial masters. African slaves showed an extraordinary relationship with their traditions, which made it hard for their masters to fully take control of them. Their immediate goal at that time was survival, but they had the hope that one day they would be free. The slave masters found it hard to fully take control of the slaves without putting the running of their plantations in jeopardy (Logue, 1996). The tendency by the African American slaves to hold on to their traditions was what enabled them to get through the torturous hardships experienced during the colonial period.

The survival of the African slaves during the colonial times and through the civil war is deeply entrenched in various aspects of their original traditions in West Africa. African culture is popular for its richness in religious and cultural practices. One of the most valued behavioral aspects among African communities is hard work. In most parts of African where slaves were drawn from were predominantly agriculturalists (Logue, 1996). Therefore while they were captured and shipped to America and its colonies, they had no problem working in the farms as it was a job that they were already accustomed to. The European slave masters had already noted the positive aspect in the African culture where hard work was greatly valued. Therefore when capturing them, they were aware of the fact that they were the right people for the job. African culture is based on family values. Slave masters and colonialists found it quite hard to separate families. They encouraged them to work in families to improve productivity (Logue, 1996). The deep respect for family unity helped the African slaves survive through the colonial period. In addition, they still kept their African family names and passed them on to their children.

Despite the hardships that the African slaves went through during the colonial times, their survival prevailed in the long run. Africans are known for their deep respect of their culture and religion. During the colonial period, African slaves never lost various aspects of their culture. They continued to practice their traditional religion. This is evident in some of the colonies especially those in the Caribbean where they continued to practice Voodoo (Winans, 1993). Other aspects such as music were not lost either. They practiced played African instruments such as drums, Banjos, flutes, among others (Winans, 1993). Instead of being assimilated into the new culture, they passed on their cultures to their children. While working and digging, they used to sing their African songs. Close adherence and practice of their African traditions helped them connect with their roots and survive through the colonial period and the civil war. White people viewed some of these traditions especially their dances as being evil and an expression of debauchery but they still held on to their traditions.

Between 1619 and 1860, slavery in American and its colonies was at its height of prevalence. By this time, many groups of African slaves had been shipped into the continent and sold to work as slaves in the plantations. Slavery did not just affect the black African slaves but also the white Americans as well. The realization of their rights as human beings compelled the slaves to fight for their freedom which led to the emergence of the anti-slavery groups and the revolutionary war. Between the years 1773 and 1774, the slaves in Massachusetts presented a petition to the colonial authorities demanding for their freedom citing the issue of liberty and their natural rights (Schneider, & Schneider, 2014). A number of years later, a group of patriots and loyalists offered freedom to the slaves in exchange for service enabled many slaves to take up arms and take part in the revolution. The revolution was also the inspiration behind the emergence of many anti-slavery groups which were of the view that slavery was evil and a violation of the basic human rights. They had memberships in the form of both blacks and whites. Being a free slave did not mean that they could enjoy freedom (Winans, 1993). They lived in the fear of being recaptured and being sold as slaves.

During this period, both free and enslaved Africans showed extraordinary abilities to get back their dignity and identity. The colonial slave masters had put into place legal restrictions that not only dehumanized the slaves, but also barred them from taking part in any activity of economic building. In the year 1761, revolts against slavery started. A group of African Americans referred to as the Quakers argued that no single man had the right to own another man (Winans, 1993). The revolts continued intensifying in different states across the colonies and in 1777, the state of Vermont abolished slavery. Three years later, the state of Pennsylvania followed suit and also abolished slavery. This event set a boundary between the values of the pro-slavery and anti-slavery states.

Another notable event was the work done by Frederick Douglass, one of the most influential African American figures. In 1847, he began an anti-slavery newspaper called The North Star (Schneider, & Schneider, 2014). This brought the issue of slavery to the entire nation and the rest of the world. His work also helped to support the anti-slavery movements by airing their sentiments to the rest of the world. In 1850, California joined the states that had abolished slavery in their territories. Women were also not left behind in fighting slavery. Mary Price in 1788 presented a petition to parliament to stop slavery. She became a champion of anti-slavery in America. Harriet Tubman in 1849 escaped slavery and also played a great role in helping black slaves escape slavery in the south (Schneider, & Schneider, 2014). These events illustrate just how the African American slaves showed the ability to fight for their dignity and reclaim their identity as African Americans.

The events described above showcased the ability of the American constitution as well as the declaration of independence to live up to the promise of safeguarding the rights of American citizens. The American constitution declares that American belong to people who live in it (citizens). The former slaves now free African Americans form part of this group. The anti-slavery revolts that started in 1761 championed by the Quakers showed the recognition of the basic rights of American citizens. The American constitution stipulates that people ought to be free and no single person has any right to own another. The move by the state of Vermont years later abolishes slavery marked a big milestone in the attainment of this basic human right. As more people came to recognize the importance of freedom and, more states declared slavery to be illegal in their territories.

The role played by Frederick Douglass in 1847 also shows the ability of the constitution to enable its citizens to air their grievances. As a former slave who had been able to educate himself, he had become the voice of his community (African Americans) and fought for their rights. According to Schneider, & Schneider (2014), the constitution guarantees freedom of expression among its citizens and Frederick Douglass used this provision to bring the whole world to the attention of the evils that were happening as a result of slavery. The struggle for freedom, recognition and self-dignity from the bondage of slavery among African Americans has been hard. However, despite the hardships involved, freedom has eventually been attained. Both the constitution of the United States and the attainment of independence have helped to ensure that slavery remains something of the past and that the rights and freedoms of each and every citizen are fully protected.

From the discussion, slavery was indeed brutal to African American slaves shipped from Africa. However, their survival was only made possible by their fact that they held on to their African traditions and refused to be psychologically colonized by their colonial masters. The events illustrated show some of the struggles that they went through to be legally protected by the constitution. Today, the freedom that their descendants enjoy can be attributed to the struggle that their forefathers went through in the fight for dignity and recognition as human beings with equal abilities as their white counterparts.

References

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