

LECTURE 8 - Abolition and Emancipation

Outline:

- Abolition of the Slave Trade
- Colonization Schemes
- Slave Emancipation

Abolition of the Slave Trade

Somerset Case

The Somerset Case set the stage for the abolition movement in Britain. James Somerset, a colonial American slave, was purchased in Boston by Charles Stewart a Customs officer. When Stewart returned to England in 1769, he brought Somerset with him when he, but Somerset escaped. Somerset was recaptured and Stewart had him imprisoned on the ship bound for the British colony of Jamaica to be sold to a plantation. The ship's captain was ordered to produce Somerset before the Court so they could determine whether his imprisonment was legal. In 1772, abolitionist and lawyer Granville Sharpe defended the case for Somerset. Sharpe argued that while colonial laws might permit slavery, neither the common law of England nor any law made by Parliament recognized the existence of slavery, and slavery was therefore illegal in England. The judge agreed and declared that it was also illegal to forcibly remove slaves from England, and granted Somerset his freedom. The Somerset decision established a radical precedent in the British colonial world. It effectively ended the holding of slaves within England and strengthened the British and American abolitionist movements.

Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807

In early March of 1807, American President Thomas Jefferson signed a bill "to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States." Three weeks later, Britain passed an Act for the Abolition of The Slave Trade. However, in neither country did the new legislations imply the immediate end of the international slave trade. They both gave slave ships one year to comply. In the meantime, they could still legally transport enslaved Africans to the Americas. Despite these laws the U.S. and Britain remained involved in slave trade. Enslaved Africans continued to arrive in to the United States until 1860; and British ships were deeply involved in the trade throughout the 19th century.

As noted in the Afigbo article, it would be easy for West African elites to abandon the centuries-old Atlantic slave trade. Those on the coasts had become dependent on the trade for ridding societies of undesirable groups, such as thieves, debtors, and those categorized as witches. In Dahomey, for instance, the Atlantic slave trade was at the heart of economic life. The royal plantations depended on slave their labor, and the military gained much of their training during slave raids in the interior. But over the 19th century, they slowly adjusted, and developed viable trade in agricultural and metal commodities that replaced the slave trade.

Colonization Schemes

Britain and Colonization to Sierra Leone

Colonization Schemes emerged in England as British Loyalists from the American Revolution began evacuating to Britain, and parts of the British Empire. The first known colonization effort took place in Sierra Leone. The original settlers, 450 destitute black men and women from England arrived in 1787. In 1792, they were joined by twelve hundred Black Loyalists from Canada, former U.S. slaves who had fought alongside the British Army during the Revolutionary War. They left for Sierra Leone because they were dissatisfied with the social conditions and the racial climate in Nova Scotia, where they had been sent. In 1800, several hundred Jamaican Maroons arrived, men and women who had been deported to Canada after signing a peace treaty with the British. In its early years, the settlement was governed by the Sierra Leone Company, an organization founded by British humanitarians with the goal of developing agricultural and other products for trade with England. Its population rapidly increased after 1807 with Africans recaptured from slave ships following the British and American abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. These "recaptives" or Liberated Africans came from throughout western, central, and southeastern Africa. About 58,000 were eventually settled in Sierra Leone. In 1808, Sierra Leone became Britain's first formal colony in West Africa.

U.S. and Colonization to Liberia

In the U.S. there were multiple opinions about whether black Americans should leave the U.S. or stay. Some blacks supported emigration because they thought that African Americans would never receive justice in the United States. Some whites saw colonization as a way of ridding the nation of blacks, while others believed black Americans would be happier in Africa, where they could live free of racial discrimination. Others added that black American colonists could play a central role in Christianizing and "civilizing" Africa.

Others believed African Americans should remain in the United States to fight against slavery and for full legal rights as American citizens.

The American Colonization Society (ACS), founded in 1816 by a group of slaveholders, proposed to relocate free blacks in the U.S. to West Africa, particularly Liberia, so that slaves wouldn't be so influenced by the idea of freedom. Abolitionists harshly attacked the ACS and discredited colonization as a slaveholder's scheme to maintain the institution of slavery.

Though Sierra Leone would continue to receive African-American immigrants over the years, their primary destination soon became Liberia. The controversial ACS helped them in this endeavor. Although the ACS did not gain widespread support among African Americans, who saw the organization as a means by which whites hoped to deport free blacks, some people, dissatisfied with their lives in the United States, sought help from the society. Most were free blacks who had either lived in the North all their lives or had been born in the South, or who had been slaves freed from bondage on the expressed condition that they leave the United States. Between 1820 and the arrival of the first 80 migrants

through 1854, an estimated 16,000 migrants settled in Liberia. In 1847, Liberia became an independent nation in West Africa.

Brazil and Colonization to Nigeria

Starting in the 1830s, former slaves in Brazil began migrating to Nigeria, primarily to Lagos. Known as "Agudas" in Nigeria, many of the African-descended returnees from Brazil chose to return to Nigeria principally to re-connect with their homeland. Many (if not the greater majority) of them were originally descended from the Yoruba and because of this, they were mostly regarded as a part of the ethnic groups of Southern Nigeria. The ex-slaves were notably technically skilled artisans and were known for the distinctive Brazilian architecture built in Lagos. By the 1880s, the Agudas comprised about 9% of the population of Lagos.

Slave Emancipation in the Americas

Britain, 1838

In 1833, Britain passed the Abolition of Slavery Act that applied primarily its colonies in the Caribbean. But rather create a truly emancipated population, the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act replaced slavery with an apprenticeship system. The apprenticeship system was designed to ease the transition from slavery to freedom by forcing the ex-slaves to remain on their plantations for a period of six years. Its main purpose was to prevent the immediate large-scale abandonment of estates by the workers. As you can imagine, planters continued to ill-treat and exploit the former slaves, although the freedmen and women exercised their own ability to negotiate for better treatment and right. The former slaves also voiced their discontent through strikes and armed revolt. The system ultimately proved too cumbersome to administer and was terminated in 1838, which finally ended slavery in the British Colonies.

U.S., 1865

With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the slave system began to break down throughout much of the U.S. south because of pressure from Union army occupation, black enlistment in the Union army, and Union support for fugitive slaves. The Civil War would ultimately lead to the end of chattel slavery in the U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. It promised freedom for slaves in the Confederacy as soon as the Union armies reached them, and authorized the enlistment of African Americans in the Union Army. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free slaves in the Union-allied slave-holding states that bordered the Confederacy. Since the Confederate States did not recognize the authority of President Lincoln, and the proclamation did not apply in the border states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland or Missouri, at first the proclamation freed only slaves who had escaped behind Union lines. Still, the proclamation