

Introduction

Historically, slavery and abolition in the United States represent opposite sides of the same shield. They were both intimately connected with the expansion of Europe, the rise of modern capitalism, and with each other. When the New World was discovered, its limitless land areas cried for exploitation, which, of course, required enormous capital and labor.

In attempting to deal with the problem of labor, Americans tapped three sources: the labor of the American Indian, the imported African, and the European immigrant. Contrary to popular conception, kidnapping, indenture, and slave purchase were practiced by the traders in acquiring laborers from Europe as well as from Africa. However, color, availability, and the social sanctions made inevitable the triumph of negro slavery over kidnapping and indenture.

In the United States, economics and climate gave American negro slavery, in time, a sectional character. Even within these limits the concentration was so definite that, by 1860, 10 percent of the families owned 90 percent of the slaves. As with almost every economic system there was a political superstructure and a crown of ideology that made what was profitable, that of right by law, custom, and ethics.

Thus, in slave-trading countries, there arose abolition movements. Among groups whose economic interests were not threatened (in some instances aided) by the antislavery effort, such a spirit flourished. Moreover, apart from the economic orientation, eighteenth-century rationalism and the Rights of Man theory of the French and American revolutions, as well as the original Christian ethic, gave impetus to the idea of the equality and brotherhood of all men. In France, for instance, Gregoire, Lafayette, Condorcet, and Brissot de Warville were leaders of the Friends of the Blacks. And, in England, Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, and Granville Sharp headed a similar crusade.

In America, as slavery became predominant in the South, the antislavery movement, in a converse manner, was evident in the North. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, the early persuasive emancipationist movement in the South was dead. And in the North the effort under the leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld, Frederick Douglass, the Tappan brothers, and the Grimke sisters became positive and aggressive.