

Slavery: 4 White Slavery in America

White slavery has been expunged from historical studies, but it was rampant for centuries. When mentioned the term 'indentured servitude' or 'servant' is used instead or it is implied to be temporary or convict punishment, but those involved called themselves 'slaves' and the word 'servant' was then synonymous with 'slave'. 100,000 'convicts' were transported in despicable conditions to America under the Waltham Act (1723) for minor civil offences; 90% were in lifetime slavery. 17th c. deeds of states and counties mention this '*perpetual slavery*' but these are ignored by historians. Though a small minority was freed after several years, many died in service. Over half of the immigrants to the 13 Colonies were White slaves, long before any Black slaves; in fact there were 12 White slaves on the Mayflower. Children born to these slaves were also enslaved. Wives and children were often separated. In fact, free Black property owners had liberty when White slaves were worked to death in sugar mills and plantations. 80% of White slaves in the sugar plantations in the West Indies did not survive their first year. In 1659 Parliament debated selling Whites as slaves to the colonies. Slavery in the British West Indies began at least as early as 1627. While Indians from Guyana were well treated workers, White slaves in Barbados were worked to death. White slaves, chiefly British and Irish, were the foundation of the sugar industry.

In the 18th and 19th centuries there were more indentures but Whites were still kidnapped and sold into slavery, plus convict slaves. Irish slaves were treated far more harshly than Black slaves in the 19th century because they were weaker and less value. White slaves in America were usually '*the surplus poor*' from Britain or kidnapped children, often from port cities, press-ganged to work the plantations and rounded up like sheep.

Transport of 17th-18th c. White slaves was horrendous, being kept below deck the entire voyage (up to 12 weeks) chained with 50 others and horses. Disease was rife and often half the slaves died en route. On occasion the death rate was worse than the later transportation of Blacks from Africa after 1650. Young children rarely survived. Small vessels could have 600 slaves aboard.

The myth is that Chinese coolies and Mexican peasants built the American railroads, cleared forests and built infrastructure. In fact, Irish Navvies and other Whites were mostly involved. Congressman David Wilmot got authority to keep Black slaves out of the American West because it was filled with White virtual slaves. Men were press-ganged into the Army and Navy in the American Revolution and whipped with 200 lashes for minor infractions. Whites were called 'rednecks', 'redshanks' and 'crackers'.

The fact is that in the South before the Civil War, Blacks were in a much better position than White slaves. Black slaves were expensive and so were better treated than White slaves. Black slaves often had positions of great trust, being stewards of the plantation, butlers the household or even nannies to slave-owner's children; in some cases they were even armed with guns. White slaves were considered as trash, especially Irish-Catholics, who were considered as expendable. Italians were also held in contempt while the word 'Honky' was originally applied as a term of derision for Hungarians. White slaves longed to be treated like Black slaves; they were below Black slaves in the social ranking. In fact, Black policemen were used to control White slave uprisings.

For more information read Michael A Hoffman, '*They were white and they were slaves*'.