US History Chapter 4 Lesson 1B

The Growth of Slavery

Slavery was widely practiced in West Africa. West African kingdoms enslaved those they defeated in war.

Some were sold to Arabs, worked in the fields, or in gold mines.

Colonists needed a large labor force for their plantations. West African slave traders met this need.

They sold captives gained from wars. This became a major part of the colonial economy.

For enslaved Africans, the voyage to America usually began with a march to a European fort on the West African coast. There they were sold to Europeans.

The Middle Passage

The trip across the ocean was called the “Middle Passage”. This was named because it was often the second or middle leg of the three part route known as the triangular trade (trade route between three destinations, such as Britain, West Africa and the West Indies).

This trip was a terrible ordeal. Chained together for more than a month, prisoners could hardly sit or stand. They received little food or water, if they died or became too ill they were thrown overboard. If they refused to eat they were whipped.

If they survived they were put up for sale at the slave market.

The Life of a Slave

Some slaves did housework, but most worked the fields. Plantation owners hired overseers (bosses) to keep the slaves working hard.

Slave codes existed (rules focusing on the behavior and punishment of slaves). Some slaves were not allowed to leave the plantation without written permission.

Slaves were seldom allowed to move about freely or gather in large groups. For some it was illegal to learn to read or write.

Punishments ranged from whipping for minor misdeeds to hanging or burning to death for more serious crimes.

The Africans had strong family ties but families were often torn apart because a mother or child could be sold off.

They developed a culture that drew on the languages, customs, and religions of their homeland. Some slaves learned a trade such as carpentry, blacksmithing, or weaving.

Some could eventually buy their freedom.

Critics of Slavery

Not all colonists believed in slavery. Many Puritans, Quakers and Mennonites condemned slavery.