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## Slavery in Tennessee and Abolitionist Movement

### **Introduction**

In the late days of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Europeans and the British experienced deficiencies in laborers. Comparative with American history the new world was a labor hungry society. They thus resorted to the importation of slaves to provide cheap labor on their plantations. Africans were captured by their fellow Africans in raids and sold to rulers who sold them to the Europeans. The trip across the seas ranged from a number of weeks to some months during these trips deaths rates ranged from 10 to 20 percent (Mitchell 53).

### **The Movement**

The abolitionist movement that characterized much of Tennessee in the early days of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was basically done to stop slave trade which had become so inhuman by this time. This was also replicated in other British North American colonies. The people who spearheaded this revolution and even influenced the masses to revolt against it are the Quakers who had moved into Tennessee in 1790. They said that slavery was against their Christian beliefs (Mitchell 54). Tennessee joined the abolition movement in 1796 at a time when the union had already made some successful progression. The first movement against

slavery in Tennessee was staged in East Tennessee. This can justify why the American congress legislated against slavery in 1807. (Mitchell 57).

As a result, a number of prominent people involved in the trade decided to free their slaves and joined the fight against slave trade. These included Balch Hezekiah who had actually done it earlier in 1807, Doak Samuel joined the abolition movement in 1818 (Mitchell 57). Since many American historians on slave trade and its abolition concur that moral values at times took precedence over material interests its justifiable to state that Abolitionism was a product of new morals.

### **Violence in Tennessee's Slavery**

Slavery continued because of the duration given for its suppression through legislative process termed as the slave code. The legislation in North Carolina in 1790 bound Tennessee because it was part of North Carolina. (Mitchell 58). Violence was thus a common tool of oppression against the slaves in Tennessee. Slaves were whipped by use of a cowhide-whip during corporal punishment administration and those who fled were punished severely once captured. Since there was a whipping room on every plantation and an exceptional person assigned to this peculiar task, the South Hampton revolution in 1831 made many owners take precautions and would execute their slaves if they showed any signs of an uprising (Mitchell 59). Following these developments it can be justified that this was the beginning of the death penalty in America's history.

### **The Civil War and Its Impacts to the Abolition Movement**

By 1860 out of the Tennessee's 1,200,000 inhabitants, 275,000 were slaves representing a 25 percent of the total population. Most of these slaves were by then working in iron industries rather than on plantations. According to American historians the Civil war was justified because the nation was divided about human right and issues of slavery. The civil war caused panic amongst owners who struggled to maintain the status-quo given that it made the slaves to break free and assert their freedom albeit with a lot of hurdles in their way (Mitchell 60). When federals started arresting wealthy owners of slaves none of their slaves ran away for they did not know what lay ahead of them in the midst of the civil war. When they heard of soldiers' brutality on slaves, they decided to stay put on the plantations until when it would be safe to leave even as their owners fled the advancing federals based on the notion that the North wanted to set the slaves free and oppress the southern whites (Mitchell 60). The federal soldiers thus completely destabilized the practice of slavery. Slaves who fled from their master's homes found themselves in poverty without jobs and federal garrisons increasingly employed such free slaves who were popularly referred to as contrabands (Mitchell 61).

### **Conclusion**

The Tennessee Confederate government fell in 1862 and the military federal government took over. The military government assured the freed men their support for their complete emancipation. However there were various loopholes in this walk to freedom given that the freed men felt they should be given part of their master's land, which was not easy. After a number of consultations abandoned lands were distributed to the blacks. The blacks

were also given credit to acquire other lands. Nevertheless they were still disabled without the skills to farm on these lands. Within no time they started taking their children to school but on the socio-economic and political front they faced prejudice on account of their race. The prejudice led to civil disobedience for they felt they had done a lot for the federal government through siding with it during the civil war. The federal government refused to look into their plight and instead sided with their fellow whites. According to American history from the 1880's to 1960's segregation was forced through legislation this can justify why the Negro entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a free man but discriminated against. (Mitchell 61).

Work Cited

Mitchell Mielnik, *The Tennessee fact list of Culture and History*, 50, 1 (2005). 53-61. Print.