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### Research & Writing 17: Slavery

Images of slavery had been displayed by slaveholders and slaves; slavery before the 1500s was seen as a regular component of complex hierarchies. Before the 1500s the type of bondage varied greatly. There was domestic, agricultural, and debt bondage. The most prominent type of bondage was agricultural slaves; slaves in this form were seen as lazy and uneducated by their masters. This structure offered no reward system for the slave's hard work. During this time ethnic characteristics started to become associated with slavery; such as hair color, and black skin. Also, most domestic slaves were of African origin. What played an important role in characterizing someone fit for slavery before the 1500s was: military weakness, barbarism, or being uncivilized. In this period, slavery was justified by implying that a certain group of people deemed "uncivilized" could learn from their civilized masters.

The slave trade, and slave societies that formed in the Atlantic; contributed to the new construction of slavery after the 1500s. The increase in the slave trade had a direct effect on the population of slaves and increased their appearance in most places. This started to affect the Caribbean and southern colonies of America, as slaves started to make up a large percentage of the population; slavery in these areas was seen as essential to the workings of plantation agriculture. Differing from slavery before the 1500s; slaves in the Atlantic region were kept

separate from the culture of their rulers; which increased the harsh treatment of slaves in this region. From this, the southern society of America and the Caribbean slaves suffered high death tolls, and the mass demand for slave import boomed. A contributing factor to the dehumanizing of the American slave population; was due to the high demand for supply on plantations like sugar, cotton, etc. Racial composition played a big role in the new construct of slavery; as most slaves in the Atlantic were of African descent. Consequently, the slaves in Latin America were a mix of people from different backgrounds, as a result of intermarriage; which in turn created slaves of different colors.

In the Caribbean, the slaves made up most of the population; with a few European elites as their authority. Because of this brute force was used, and dehumanizing tactics were used by elites, further contributing to the social divide. In the Southern American colonies, there was a cultural divide present; this was because shared cultural beliefs between Europeans and Africans could present a threat to the social and economic power of the elite. As a result, southern colonies projected the idea that the cultural divide was racial. This promoted the idea that race was defined by skin color, and carried the idea that certain skin colors were superior to others. As a result, slaves could possess the same language and religion as their masters, but would still be seen as inferior; this also killed the notion of racial mixing, so if you weren't of pure European descent you were still considered African American and furthermore a slave.

Remnants of slavery can still be displayed in 21st-century America today. The race theory established during slavery is still alive today. When we are applying for a job, filling out a government document, applying for a driver's license, or taking a standardized test, we are prompted to check a box to confirm what race we are. Race will forever be a part of our identity,

and is still used as a means to distinguish one group of people from another. Another harsh reality and remnant of slavery; is the existence of sundown towns which are all white towns that exclude African Americans and other minorities from a community by using intimidation, violence, and discriminatory laws. The idea of sundown towns is formed based on racial segregation, and the cultural divide that was created during slavery.

Works Cited

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