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| **The Origins of New World Slavery** |  |  |
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Why did Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Danish, and English colonists all bring slaves to their New World colonies? Here, it is essential to recognize that it was not inevitable that Europeans in the New World would rely on African slaves to raise crops, clear forests, and mine precious metals. In every New World colony, Europeans experimented with Indian slavery, convict labor, and white indentured servants. For example, as late as the early 1700s, a third of South Carolina's labor force consisted of Indian slaves.

Why, then, did every European power eventually turn to African labor? Was this, as some have argued, the product of deep-seated racial prejudice? Or was it the product of a haphazard and random process that took place gradually with little real sense of the ultimate outcome? Or were other forces at work?

Certainly there is a great deal of evidence showing that 16th century Europeans held deeply racist sentiments well before the establishment of slavery. We know, for example, that the Elizabethan English associated blackness with evil, death, and danger. They portrayed the devil as having black skin and associated beauty with fair skin. Through their religion, the English denigrated people of color, claiming that Negroes were the descendants of Noah's son Ham who was cursed by having black offspring for daring to look upon his drunken and naked father. Long before the English had contact with Africa, racist stereotypes were widespread. One English writer claimed that Negroes were naturally "addicted unto Treason, Treacherie, Murther, Theft and Robberie." Without a doubt, it was easy for the English to accept slavery because they regarded Negroes as an alien people. But it also seems clear that racism was as much a consequence of racial slavery as it was a cause.

In colony after colony, Europeans shifted from Indian to African slaves partly for demographic reasons. As a result of epidemic diseases, which reduced the native population by 50 to 90 percent, the labor supply was insufficient to meet demand. But Africans also possessed many skills that were valuable in settling the New World. They were experienced in intensive agriculture and raising livestock and knew how to raise crops like rice that Europeans were unfamiliar with.

Initially, colonists in every English colony relied on indentured white servants rather than on black slaves. During the late 15th and early 16th centuries, England's population grew by a over a third--much faster than its economy. To address a sudden explosion of crime and poverty, England's rulers forced the poor to toil in workhouses, and beginning in 1547, enslaved persistent vagabonds and branded them with the letter "S."

In the early 1600s, England viewed New World colonization as a providential solution to their country's problem of overpopulation. Thousands of England's unemployed and underemployed farmers, urban labors, debtors, and criminals were sent as "indentured servants" to the New World, where they contributed to England's wealth by raising tobacco and produced other goods. Over half of all white immigrants to the English colonies during the 17th century consisted of convicts or indentured servants.

Indentured servants agreed to work for a four or five year term of service in return for their transportation to the New World as well as food, clothing, and shelter. In certain respects, the status of white servants differed little from that of slavery. Like slaves, servants could be bought, sold, or leased. They could also be punished by whipping. Unlike slaves, however, servants were allowed to own property, and, if they survived their term of service, received their freedom along with a small sum of money known as "freedom dues." During the 17th century, indentured servants suffered an appalling death rate. Half of all white servants in the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland died within five years of their arrival. Since servants cost half as much as slaves, they were a more economical investment.

Black slavery took root in the American colonies slowly. As early as 1619, a Dutch ship carried the first Africans to Virginia, but it would not be until the 1680s that black slavery became the dominant labor system on plantations. As late as 1640, there were probably only 150 blacks in Virginia (the colony with the highest black population), and in 1650, 300. But by 1680, the number had risen to 3,000 and by 1704, to 10,000. Faced by a shortage of white indentured servants and fearful of servant revolt, English settlers increasingly resorted to enslaved Africans.

As the supply of English servants diminished, colonists in the Chesapeake imported increasing numbers of slaves directly from Africa. Many were sent to inland plantations, where planters believed that it would be easier to control the slave population.

To meet planters' growing demand for slaves, the English government established the Royal African Company in 1672. After 1698, when Britain ended the Royal African Company's monopoly of the slave trade, the number of enslaved Africans brought into the colonies soared. Between 1700 and 1775, more than 350,000 African slaves entered the American colonies. By the mid-18th century, blacks made up almost 70 percent of the population of South Carolina, 40 percent in Virginia, 8 percent in Pennsylvania, and 4 percent in New England.

Answer the following questions on a ***separate sheet of paper***:

1. What kind of racism existed in 16th century Europe?
2. Why did Native American labor transition to African labor?
3. Why did indentured white servitude become replaced with African labor?
4. Why were Africans willing to enslave their own people? (see textbook or notes)
5. **In your opinion,** why did every European power eventually turn to African slave labor? Explain your answer.