Which came first, Racism or slavery? Is a topic that has been long debated, and is reminiscent of the question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”. It is not uncommon for one to see slavery as the clearest example of racism in America to date. The idea that many people don’t consider is that slavery could actually have existed in America before racism did, and there is a great amount of evidence supporting both sides of this issue. After analyzing the evidence for both sides of this argument, it is undeniable that slavery existed before racism and America, and was thus was the cause for racism in America, not vice versa.

It may seem strange to think that one could possibly enslave a race without being racist towards them. However, that is not true, one must remember the first forms of labor that farmers had in America, indentured servants. Indentured servants were people who belonged to someone else and worked for them for a fixed number of years as a way to pay off a debt, such as payment for the voyage to America. The problem with this was that these servants were not permanent, so the farmers began looking towards enslavement, beginning with Native Americans, which once again posed some problems. The issue this time was that Native Americans were not immune to European diseases, thus many died after contracting these illnesses. A second issue with enslaving the Native Americans was that they knew the land extremely well, and could escape relatively easily, therefore the farmers were once again forced to look elsewhere. This time they began looking towards Europe, first offering fugitives who would otherwise be executed to work as slaves in America. Next, they began looking to Ireland, however they were unable to enslave the Irish as their rights were enforced, so finally, the
farmers looked to Africa. The first 20 Africans brought over to work in the United States were not even called slaves, but were indentured servants, and were freed in 1651, after their time was served. Africans became the main source of labor as they were more resistant to European diseases than Native Americans, and did not know the land. This clearly shows that slavery existed before racism, as the Americans were simply looking for a better source of work, as they even considered enslaving the Irish, men of their own skin color.

It is also important to consider racism as a possible cause of slavery, and that racism possibly came before slavery in America. In Winthrop D. Jordan’s, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward The Negro, 1550-1812* there are examples of sixteenth century travel records that show a racist attitude towards Africans held by the British, on the basis of skin color and religion. It can be argued that this racism is therefore the cause of slavery in America, but there is no evidence of this being a widespread attitude. One could also argue that all of the slave laws of the 1660s were prejudiced towards the blacks, however, the laws affected the whites and Native Americans who were in captivity as well, thus eliminating any notion of prejudice.

“Which came first, slavery or racism?” is an age old question, with a plethora of evidence supporting each side. However, through close observation and analysis of historical writings, it is quite clear that slavery preceded racism in America. It is quite evident that slavery was able to precede racism due to the lack of cheap, sustainable labor present in the New World, where many farmers went in hopes of getting rich. Although there are travel records that show hatred of Africans based on skin color as well as religion, there is no evidence of this racism elsewhere, and therefore cannot be used to prove anything. Not only did slavery precede racism, it was the necessary prerequisite to the prevalence of racism in America.
Works Cited-


