

Actual historic causes for White enslavement

Kidnapping and press-gangs

In many cases poor people, especially children, were just kidnapped, captured off the street and transported to America. Children could be seen being driven through a town in herds to a ship. This press-ganging (or 'spiriting') began under Charles I and continued under Cromwell and Charles II. It was a means of keeping down the poor white underclass of potential rebels feared by the aristocracy. Even 17th and 18th century economists favoured enslavement of poor Whites.

In 1618 Parliament passed a law enabling the capture of children aged 8-years or older who were street vagrants; they were to be slave workers in Virginia for 16 years (boys) and 14 years (girls). In 1652 an act was passed enabling town magistrates to apprehend beggars on the street and transport them for labour in the colonies for their good. Legislation of 1664 enabled kidnapping of White children for slavery. In 1739 in Scotland two lairds ordered the kidnapping of over 100 men, women and children out of their own homes around Skye. In this case they escaped at port in Ireland. RL Stevenson's novel 'Kidnapped' is based on a true story of a Scottish nobleman enslaved for 13 years.

Enslaved criminals

Crimes that resulted in enslavement include:

- Poaching to feed a starving family.
- Stealing a loaf of bread.
- Damaging the shrubbery of an aristocrat's garden.
- Interrupting a preacher's sermon (in 1655 four kids were whipped and burned first).
- Vandalising a gate, canal bank, fishpond, fruit trees or hops. [The death penalty could be given for these.]
- Sending threatening letters.
- Bigamy, marrying in secret.
- 'Wandering'.

Examples of people who were enslaved:

- A starving pregnant woman who stole a bowl of soup.
- A 12-year old boy who picked a pocket.
- A man with a wife, a child and a mother to support who stole a sheep to feed them.
- A pregnant seamstress who stole seven yards of lace. The baby died on the voyage.

Prisoners of war or political prisoners and dissidents were also enslaved. 600 Scottish troops captured after the Battle of Worcester were shipped to Virginia in 1652. The rebels of 1666, 1685 (Monmouth's rebellion), 1715 and 1746 (Jacobites) were enslaved and transported to America. In 1655 half of the white population of Barbados were political prisoners, enslaved for life. Of the 1300 Cavaliers enslaved in 1652 in Barbados, almost all of them died in slavery.

Poor parents with many children were expected to give some up for enslavement. If they refused this poor-relief was refused them.

Data from Michael A Hoffman, *'They were white and they were slaves'*.