

Irish Slavery in America

" To hell or Barbados....." a book written by Sean Callaghan reveals the truths behind the Irish who were sold into slavery.

After the Battle of Kinsale 1601, the English had captured some 30,000 military prisoners, and thus created an official policy of banishment, or transportation. James II encouraged selling the Irish as slaves to planters and settlers in the New World colonies. The first recorded sale of Irish slaves was to a settlement on the Amazon River, in 1612.

In 1625, an official Proclamation ordered for Irish prisoners to get rounded up and sold as slaves to English Planters. Between 1629 and 1632 a large numbers of Irish, men and women, were sent to Guiana, Antiqua and Montserrat. By 1637 approx 69% of the population of Montserrat were Irish slaves. Negro slaves had to be purchased, 20 to 50 pound sterling, Irish slaves were captured and sold for 900 pounds of cotton. The Irish became the largest source of slaves for English slave traders.

From 1641 to 1652, over 550,000 Irish were killed by the English and 300,000 more were sold as slaves. As more men were transported, leaving their wives and children behind, they too were also rounded up and sold as slaves. Irish women and their daughters were of lighter complexion than the black slaves and were considered more valuable as domestic slaves.

In 1649, Cromwell began a campaign of terror on Ireland. All captured soldiers were transported to be sold into slavery. A few months later, in 1650, 25,000 Irish were sold to planters in St. Kitt. During the 1650s , over 100,000 Irish children, generally from 10 to 14 years old, were taken from their parents, and sold as slaves in the West Indies, Virginia and New England. **In fact, more Irish were sold as slaves to the American colonies from 1651 to 1660 than the total existing "free" population of the Americas!** In 1652, Cromwell ordered that the Irish were to be transported overseas, starting with 12,000 Irish prisoners sold to Barbados. The infamous " To Hell or to Connaught " proclamation was issued on 1 May 1654, confiscating all Irish held lands, and the native Irish were to be relocated west of the Shannon or be transported to the West Indies. To expediate the process in 1657 the law was further clarified to read: "Those who fail to transplant themselves into Connaught or Co Clare within six months... Shall be attainted of high treason... are to be sent into America or some other parts beyond the seas... those banished who return are to suffer the pains of death as felons by virtue of this act, without benefit of Clergy." It was not a crime to kill any Irish, as soldiers were encouraged to do, but the slave trade proved too profitable to ignore. As a result 52,000 Irish, were sold to Barbados and Virginia alone. Another 30,000 Irish men and women were taken prisoners and ordered transported and sold as slaves. In 1656, Cromwell's Council of State ordered that 1000 Irish girls and 1000 Irish boys be rounded up and taken to Jamaica to be sold as slaves to English planters. Still there were more as little record was kept of this activity.

Few people realize from 1600 -1699, more Irish were sold as slaves than Africans.

Servant indentures were a mutual agreement whereby a servant would sell a period of time in exchange for passage, in return he would receive housing, food, clothing, and usually a piece of

land at the end of the term of service. But the Irish were more often an exception. Sometimes the slavery was not recorded as such, or not recorded at all.

From 1625 the Irish were sold, with one purpose -as slaves. There were no indenture agreements, no protection, no choice. They were captured and turned over to shippers to be sold for their profit. The profits were huge, 900 pounds of cotton for an Irish slave. Everyone in the slave trade from Ireland made a profit, except for the slave.

Irish and African slaves were housed in the same facilities and were the property of the plantation owner. The planters had to pay more for a black slave. **African Negroes cost generally about 20 to 50 pounds Sterling, compared to 900 pounds of cotton (about 5 pounds Sterling) for an Irish. Blacks were treated better.**

The Pope and all Roman Catholics were considered an enemy of God and civilization. Any infraction was treated harshly and severely. Many Irish died as a result of their treatment. It was not a crime to kill an Irish slave, merely a loss. However Parliament saw the need to enact certain protection for slaves. In 1677, the Parliament passed the Act to Regulate the treatment of Slaves on British Plantations, designating authorized punishments to include whippings and brandings for slave offenses against a Christian. Irish Catholics were not considered Christians, so these protections did not apply.

The planters began breeding the Irish women, because it was profitable. Children of slaves were themselves slaves. Planters then began to breed Irish women with African men to produce more slaves who had lighter skin and brought a higher price. In 1681, legislation was passed "forbidding the practice of mating Irish slave women to African slave men for the purpose of producing slaves for sale." Not out of moral consideration, but because slave traders saw it as competition.

In 1691, following the Battle of the Boyne and the defeat of King James, the Irish slave trade had a fresh supply of captives ready to transport. For the next 100 years or more the policy remained with transportation of Irish men, women and children, to be sold into slavery- a policy of ethnic cleansing.

Finally, in 1839, a bill was passed in England forbidding these activities, bringing the Irish Slave trade to an end.