Views of Freedom Prior to American Revolution ——A View of Eric Foner's Give Me Liberty! An American History

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Abstract: Eric Foner's Give Me Liberty! An American History[1] utilizes theme of "freedom" to describe American history. This article demonstrates various "views of freedom" of different groups before the founding of the United States, and shows the complexity and multifaceted nature of "American freedom."

1. Introduction

The modern-time United States is a nation of immigrants. Since Columbus discovered the New World，this Indian settlement first ushered in colonial rule of Spain, France, the Netherlands, Britain and other countries, then followed by a large number of immigrants from Germany, Ireland and other places, and finally from every part of the world - especially those from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America - have made this land of great variety. People from different countries and different classes met on this land as well as different cultures were brought and merged here, gradually forming the United States today.

It is precisely because of such a multicultural background that the United States attaches great importance to the historical education of the nation, thereby shaping and cultivating citizens' sense of national identity. However, traditional American historiography, with the white elite as the core, preaching the "great, glorious, correct" American history, concealing many unfairness and injustice in American history, eventually presents an American history of incomplete and unreal. After experiencing the civil rights movement and the baptism of multiculturalism, the United States needs new knowledge of American history and requires the historical identity accepted by all Americans. New American historiography needs to restore the true face of American history, describe the history of different groups (including those excluded from traditional historiography), establish the connection between individual and group history and that of America, transform the memory of separate groups into a collective memory of the whole nation, and build a new and solid national identity.

Professor Foner has made outstanding contributions in the field of "new history". In his work *The Story of American Freedom*, Eric Foner has ingeniously examined the different and different groups in the different eras with the theme of "freedom" and detailed the complex and diverse views of freedom in the United States. *Give Me Liberty! An American History* (hereinafter referred to as *Give Me Liberty!*) on the basis of *The Story of American Freedom*, in the order of time, narrates "freedom" integrated into the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of the United States. In terms of thoughts and other aspects, while taking into account important historical events, historical figures, and historical thoughts, *Give Me Liberty!* has placed more perspectives on American groups that have long been neglected by traditional historiography, reconstructing American history from the bottom up, restoring imperfections of American history, showing the differences in the views of freedom between different periods and different groups, indicating that the different views of freedom that have always existed in American history conflict and compete, and providing a more complete, objective and inclusive history of the United States.

This article will base on *Give Me Liberty!*, trying to systematically analyze the ideas of freedom of different countries, different races and different strata before American Revolution to more clearly illustrate the differences between different views of freedom, and to reveal the complexity

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and multifaceted nature of "American freedom."

2. Views of Freedom in the New World and the Old World

(1) Religion

Religion takes the super-world belief as the core and belongs to the field of spiritual culture. It has an important influence on human ideology and customs. There is a certain difference between the religious beliefs of Europeans and the religious beliefs of Indians.

This difference is first manifested in the understanding of God. Although most Indians believed that there is “a single Creator atop the spiritual hierarchy," they also believe that "[spiritual] power…suffused the world, and sacred spirits could be found in all kinds of living and inanimate things – animals, plants, trees, water, and wind". This is different from the Christian faith of Europeans. Christians believed that God created this world, God is the only true God, and other beliefs are idolatry, deviating from the correct faith[2]. In addition, the pursuit of faith on both sides is different. The Indians hoped "[through] religious ceremonies…to harness the aid of powerful supernatural forces to serve the interests of man." To this end, they held various ceremonies to appease the souls of killed animals, protect crops, and exorcise evil spirits. Vis-à-vis Christians, they were justified by faith. They needed to take up the cross and follow the path of Jesus Christ to the kingdom of heaven. They were not pursuing the life of this world, but that of the kingdom of heaven to enjoy eternal joy and peace.

It is precisely because the Europeans upheld such a "Christian liberty": "Freedom meant abandoning the life of sin to embrace the teachings of Christ." Under this definition, the person who accepted the teaching of Christ simultaneously became “free from sin” and “servants to God”, so that obedience and freedom affirm each other. Europeans believed that Indians "lack genuine religion" or even "worshiped the devil." The shamans and herb healers who were respected by the Indians were considered to be a group of “witch doctors" and were the superstitious moder. In the Indian concept, nature was full of “sprits and souls”; in the eyes of Europeans, however. Nature was “a collection of potential commodities, a source of economic opportunity.” Given that in Europeans deemed that “true religion was thought to promote the progress of civilization", they could easily think that the Indian religion cannot promote or even hinder the progress of its civilization, so it was not a "real religion." For Europeans, teaching Indians with Christian doctrine and turning Indians into Christians meant to "save the Indians from heathenism” and bring them "true freedom."

Of course, there were certain differences between the religions of European countries. The Spain was the “most powerful bastion of orthodox Catholicism”. Soon after the Columbus voyage, Catholic Pope Alexander VI divided the non-Christian world between Spain and Portugal and asked the two countries to spread the Catholic Church to the indigenous people in the Americas to justify the conquer. The Spaniards firmly convinced “the superiority of Catholicism to all other religions", so while striving to turn the Indians into Catholics, they were also committed to eradicating local traditional beliefs. France was also a Catholic home base. King of France hoped to maintain New France as “an outpost of Catholicism”. The Jesuits attempted to convert the Indians into Catholics and achieved some results, but the French missionaries “allowed Christian Indians to retain a high degree of independence and much of their traditional social structures,” and “did not seek to suppress all traditional religious practices." The French gave the Native Americans a certain degree of freedom of religious tolerance. The Dutch enjoy the freedom of widespread religious tolerance that was banned in other parts of Europe. Although the Netherlands had the official church, the Dutch Reformed, individuals could “hold whatever religious beliefs they wished”. And this tolerance was not only for Protestantism, but also extended to “Catholics and, grudgingly, to Jews”. The Dutch were committed to "liberate the New World from the tyranny of Spain and the Catholic Church" and believed that this was to bring freedom to the Indians. The United Kingdom established Anglican Church and regarded Catholicism as its enemy. Similar to the Spanish justification for its conquest by “claiming to covert Indians to Catholicism”, the British explained their expansion in the Americas as "an obligation to liberate the New World from the tranny of the Pope." Protestant minister Richard Huckluyt in A Discourse Concerning Western Planting listed 23

reasons why Queen Elizabeth I should support the establishing of the North American colonies, including "English settlements would strike a blow against Spain's empire and therefore form part of a divine mission to rescue the New World and its inhabitants from the influence of Catholicism and tyranny."

(2) Property

The sacred and inviolable personal property is an important principle of modern society. The legitimacy of private property is of paramount importance to Westerners and thinkers have repeatedly emphasized the importance of private property. Thomas Hobbes asserts that there is no justice without property rights, and property rights are the source of justice.

Land is an important part of property. For the Indians, land was "a common resource, not an economic commodity". The 19th-century Indian leader Black Hawk once said: "The Great Spirits give [land] to his children to live upon, and cultivate as far as necessary for their subsistence; and so long as they occupy and cultivate it, they have a right to the soil." Therefore, land could not be bought or sold. In this way, the Indians rarely had the idea that "a fenced-off piece of land belonging forever a single individual or family", nor were they "devoted to the accumulation of wealth and material goods". Unlike the Indians, in the eyes of Europeans, land was a commodity that can be bought and sold, and was a personal property that can be possessed. The economic independence brought about by this opportunity was precisely the "freedom" that Europeans yearned for. In the Europeans' perspective, economic attachment was a form of slavery, and only people who can control their own labor should be regarded as having true freedom. Land was the foundation of this freedom. Europeans contended that "mixing one's labor with the earth…gave one title to the soil."

Europeans have justified their conquests based on Indians' specific land use patterns—they claimed that Indians "had not actually used the land and thus had no claim to it". Although the Indians had "highly developed agriculture and well-established towns", Europeans still frequently defined them as "nomads without communities" because of their use of land. Europeans regarded Indians did not have the "freedom" of private property, so Europeans were in fact bringing this "freedom" to the Indians.

(3) Gender Relations

Gender relations are the cornerstone of family life and have an important impact on family harmony and social solidarity. Gender relations include sexual relations, marriage and divorce, and division of jobs in production.

Most Indian societies belonged to the matriarchal clan society. In sexual relations, Indian women "openly engaged in premarital sexual relations and could even choose to divorce their husbands". In Europe, men and women could not have sex before marriage, and keeping the body holy was a basic requirement of a Christian. In terms of marriage, Indian women also "owned dwellings and tools, and a husband generally moved to live with the family of his wife." European families were dominated by men while women needed nothing but obey. A woman must marry a man's family. After her marriage, a woman could not own property or sign a contract in her own name. The husband represented the whole family to conduct business and testify in court. In the field of family division, Indian men "contributed to community's well-being and demonstrated their masculinity by success in hunting, or in the Pacific Northwest, by catching fish with nets and harpoons." Women "took responsibility not only for household duties but for most agricultural work as well." In Europe, men were responsible for farming and women for household.

Europeans could not understand the Indian gender division of labor and family relationships. Europeans therefore believed that according to their own beliefs, women were actually in an oppressed position in the Indian gender system. In their eyes, hunting and fishing by Indian men were leisure activities, "not 'real' work", and women's responsibility for field work was a manifestation of lack of freedom, and was rated as "not much better than slaves." "Europeans believed that it was the laziness of Indian men who "forced their wives to do most of the productive labor." Vis-à-vis Indian family structure, Europeans tended to think that Indian men were so "unmanly" that they were "too weak to exercise authority within their families and restrain their

wives' open sexuality." In the eyes of Europeans, the Indian gender division of labor was uncivilized and needs to be saved. And this kind of salvation, Europeans held in belief, was to bring freedom to the Indians.

(4) Social Life

In terms of social life, there were certain differences between Indians and Europeans.

The first was the sharp difference of the understanding of "authority". The Indians "did not appear to live under established governments or fixed laws, and had no respect for authority." An early trader once wrote that the Indian vocabulary "contained no entry for 'freedom' or liberte." Nor, he added, were did they have "words to express despotic power, arbitrary kings, oppressed or obedient subjects." On the other hand, in the secular definition of Europe (its religious counterpart has been discussed in Section (1) Religion), liberty was equated with "obedience to a higher authority." In this sense, freedom is "not anarchy but obedience to the law."

Another key difference was about social status. Although the status "certainly mattered in Indian societies", a few Indian societies even had "rigid social distinctions", in general the Indian leaders were not based on absolute authority. Their reputation "often rested on their willingness to share goods with others, rather than hoarding them for themselves." European residents did not enjoy the same degree of freedom. European society was "extremely hierarchical, with marked social status ranging from the king and the hereditary aristocracy down to the urban and rural poor. Inequality was built into virtually every social relationship." This inequality was not completely contradictory to the freedom in their views. In such hierarchical society, liberty came from "knowing one's social place and fulfilling the duties appropriate to one's rank."

Also, there was difference in views of personal freedom. For the Indians, "[far] more important than individual autonomy were kinship ties, the ability to follow one's spiritual value, and the well-being and security of one's community. In Indian culture, group autonomy and self-determination, and the mutual obligations that came with a sense of belonging and connectedness, took precedence over individual freedom."

In some ways, some Europeans also saw Indians "as embodying freedom." A colonial official once described The Iroquois as held "such absolute notion of liberty that they allow of no kind of superiority of one over another, and banished all servitude on their territories." But more Europeans tended to believe that the Indians were "too free, lacking the order and discipline that Europeans considered the hallmarks of civilization." A religious missionary wrote in describing the Indians, "They are born, live, and die in a liberty without restraint." Therefore, Europeans regarded the Indians barbaric. The British writer Richard Eden described the Indian life as "rather a horrible bohemian and licentiousness than a liberty", arguing that even slavery was "preferable to Indians conditions before European contact." By defining the Indians as barbarians, Europeans naturally did not recognize the freedom of the Indians as true freedom.

Another important question was, is freedom a right? If so, is freedom a privilege? Similar to the previous question, different understandings of the concept of freedom led to different answers.

European ideas of freedom still "bore the imprint of the Middle Ages", when "liberties" meant "formal, specific privileges such as self-government, exemption from taxation, or the right to practice a particular trade, granted to individuals or groups by contract, royal decree, or purchase."[3] A legal dictionary defines "freedom" as"a privilege . . . by which men may enjoy some benefit beyond the ordinary subject."

Europeans then quickly realized that this very concept of "freedom" was completely "alien to Indian societies". Although there was certain social status, the Indians allowed of "no kind of superiority of one over another" made inequality not as widespread in European societies. Under normal circumstances, "no one in Indian societies went hungry or experienced the extreme inequalities of Europe." Despite this, Europeans were reputing their own conquests by spreading freedom in the New World.

(5) Relationship

The conflict between the Indians and the colonial views of freedom in European countries was fully reflected in their direct interactions.

To the Spanish colonizers, the large native populations of the Americas were “not only souls to be saved but also a labor force to be organized to extract gold and silver that would enrich the mother country." The Spanish rulers still used "freedom" to defend this enslavement (the understanding freedom is the opposite of slavery was shared by both Indians and Europeans), claiming that this was "a means of liberating them from their own backwardness and savagery and enabling them to become part of Christian civilization”, thereby ultimately bringing Christian freedom to the enslaved Indians. The Spanish practice had caused a lot of dissatisfaction. Even the popes as well as some priests, notably the

Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas, opposed the slavery of the Indians.

In the French and Dutch colonies, the Indians enjoyed more humane treatment and broader freedom. The French adopted a “more humane policy than their imperial rivals (referring to Spain)”. Due to the fear of French government that "significant emigration would undermine France’s role as a European great power and might compromise its effort to establish trade and good relations with the Indians", and "unfavorable reports about America circulated widely in France", New France has only a small colonial population. Because New France focused on fur trade, and the French must rely on Indians to provide leather goods for their trade stations, the viability of New France “depended on friendly relations with local Indians.” The French clearly recognized this and designed “a complex series of military, commercial, and diplomatic connections”, which turned out to be “the most enduring alliances between Indians and settlers in colonial North America.” The Netherlands also determined to “treat the native inhabitants more humanely than the Spanish.” Because the Netherlands itself has “won their own independence from Spain after the longest and bloodiest war of sixteenth-century Europe”, and was “mindful of the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty”, “many Dutch identified with American Indians as fellow victims of Spanish oppression.” Plus the Dutch themselves in North America were doing business for profit, they also needed to establish friendly relations with the Indians.

English colonists did not call themselves “conquerors”, a practice different from that of the Spanish. They wanted “land, not dominion over the existing population.” They were chiefly interested in “displacing the Indians and settling on their land”, not “intermarrying with them, organizing their labor, or making them subjects of the crown.” Although some English settlers exchanged goods with the native population, most “remained obstinately separate from their Indian neighbors.” There were different practices in different colonies. For the Puritans in New England, the Indians "represented both savagery and temptation." and "resembled Catholics, with their false gods and deceptive rituals." The freedom of the Indians was the wrong freedom in the eyes of the Puritans—what Winthrop condemned as undisciplined “natural liberty” (or,“liberty to do evil”) rather than the“moral liberty” (or, “liberty to that only which is good”) of the civilized Christian. Overall, those Puritans deemed the Indians “as an obstacle to be pushed aside, rather than as potential converts." In New York, there was also mutual support between the colonists and the Indians (the Covenant Chain). William Penn, the proprietor of Pennsylvania, treated Indians with “a consideration almost unique in the colonial experience, arranging to purchase land before reselling it to colonists and offering refuge to tribes driven out of other colonies by warfare. Sometimes, he even purchased the same land twice, when more than one Indian tribe claimed it.” Penn successfully built a "friendship chain" that was very attractive to local Indians.

3. Views of Freedom in the British Empire and the Thirteen Colonies

(1) Religion

Different from the religious freedom discussed above—the spiritual freedom, this section deals more closely with religious freedom in the modern sense—the freedom of religious tolerance.

The British established Anglican Church. Extensive religious tolerance did not exist, and Catholics and Dissenting congregations were persecuted. Nearly every colony levied taxes to pay the salaries of ministers of an established church, and most barred Catholics and Jews from voting and holding public office. Different from colonies established Church of Anglican, New England had its own system. Having long subjected persecutions in England, the Puritans came to America

in search of liberty, especially “the right to worship and govern themselves in what they deemed a truly Christian manner.” The Puritans believed that freedom was "a spiritual affair”, which implied “the opportunity and the responsibility to obey God’s will through self-government and self-denial” and certainly did not mean “unrestrained action, improper religious practices, or sinful behavior”, of which, Puritans thought, there were “far too many examples in England”. True freedom depended on “subjection to authority,” according to their leader, John Winthrop. The freedom, or liberty, in the eyes of the Puritans meant that “the elect had a right to establish churches and govern society, not that others could challenge their beliefs or authority.” The practice of religious persecution also appeared in New England.

On the other hand, religious freedom was far more advanced in some American colonies than in England. For Britain, not until 1690 had the Toleration Act allowed Protestant Dissenters (but not Catholics) to worship freely, although only Anglicans could hold public office. For colonies, there was a different story. In Maryland, because the proprietor, Calvin Calvert, was a Catholic himself, he hoped that “Protestants and Catholics could live in a harmony unknown in Europe,” so he used Maryland as “a refuge for his persecuted coreligionists in England." In 1649, Maryland adopted an Act Concerning Religion, which “institutionalized the principle of toleration that had prevailed from the colony’s beginning.” Although it did not establish religious freedom in the modern sense, this law was still a milestone in religious freedom in colonial history. Roger Williams believed that "Soul liberty" requires individuals “be allowed to follow their consciences wherever they led." To Williams, any “law-abiding citizen” should be allowed to practice “whatever form of religion he chose.” So when Williams established Rhode Island, Rhode Island became "a beacon of religious freedom" and “a haven for Dissenters and Jews.” There was “no established church, no religious qualifications for voting until the eighteenth century, and no requirement that citizens attend church.” As a devout member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, William Penn hoped to establish a refuge for his coreligionists. This refuge turned out to be Pennsylvania. There was no established church in Pennsylvania, and attendance at religious services was entirely voluntary, although Jews were barred from office by a required oath affirming belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. By the mid-eighteenth century, dissenting Protestants in most colonies had gained the right to “worship as they pleased and own their churches”, although many places still barred them from holding public office and taxed them to support the official church. A visitor to Pennsylvania in 1750 described the colony’s religious diversity: “We find there Lutherans, Reformed, Catholics, Quakers, Menonists or Anabaptists, Herrnhuters or Moravian Brethren, Pietists, Seventh Day Baptists, Dunkers, Presbyterians, . . . Jews, Mohammedans, Pagans.”

(2) Colonial rights

Women's rights

North American politics in the 18th century was more democratic than Britain. Colonial women shared some certain rights with British women, including a claim to “dower rights”（the right of a married woman to inherit one-third of her husband’s property in the event that he died before she did）. But colonial women also enjoyed some of the rights that were rarely enjoyed in the British mainland. In the colonies, widows and unmarried women could sign contracts and engage in commercial activities as “femme sole”, which was expressly prohibited in the UK. Some widows were even chosen to administer their husbands’ estates or were willed their husbands’ property outright, rather than receiving only the one-third “dower rights”- the only choice for their British counterparts.

Voting rights

The wide distribution of property in the colonies led to a far higher percentage of the population enjoyed voting rights than in the Old World. About 50% to 80% of adult white males had the right to vote, while the rate of UK was less than 5%. Colonial politics, however, was “hardly democratic in a modern sense.” Voting was almost seen as a privilege for men “freed from dependence upon others.” Slaves, servants, tenants, adult sons living in the homes of their parents, the poor, and women all lacked a “will of their own” and were therefore ineligible to vote. Moreover, in some colonies, Jews, Catholics, and Protestant Dissenters like Baptists and Quakers could not vote. Free

Blacks were universally disenfranchised in the eighteenth century, despite North Carolina once restored it in 1730s. Generally, Native Americans were prohibited from voting.

Freedom of expression

The eighteenth century witnessed a considerable expansion of the “public sphere”—the world of political organization and debate independent of the government, where an informed citizenry “openly discussed questions that had previously been the preserve of officials.”

Unlike the Spanish-controlled regions, the British North American newspaper industry was rapidly developing, political posters and leaflets were widely distributed, and colonial readings were more popular. Moreover, mobile libraries in cities and towns provide borrowing services to the public.

In the UK, “freedom of speech” referred to the ability of members of Parliament to “express their views without fear of reprisal.” But outside the parliament, there was no legal protection for it. Indeed, it was not the right of ordinary citizens, but a privilege of legislators. Despite the abovementioned growth of press, freedom of the press was still considered extremely dangerous in the colonies as well as in Briton. Part of the reason was that the government believes that ordinary citizens “prone to be misled by inflammatory printed materials.” Authors and publishers might be punished for“seditious libel”—a crime that included defaming government officials—or contempt. It was elected assemblies, not governors, who most frequently discouraged freedom of the press in colonial America. Dozens of publishers “were hauled before assemblies and forced to apologize for comments regarding one or another member;” if they refused, they were jailed. The colonial newspapers, however, vigorously defended “freedom of the press as a central component of liberty”, insisting that the citizenry had “a right to monitor the workings of government and subject public officials to criticism.” The trial results of the famous Zenger case promoted the idea that “the publication of truth should always be permitted,” and it demonstrated that “the idea of free expression was becoming ingrained in the popular imagination.”

(3) Colonial obligations

Tax

After the Seven Years’ War, Britain was in “an enormous debt and vastly enlarged overseas possessions to defend” and the tax burden in Britain had reached unprecedented heights. Also, Britain no longer regarded the colonies as allies. It reverted in the mid-1760s to seeing them as “subordinates whose main role was to enrich the mother country.” Thus it seemed “only reasonable that the colonies should help pay this national debt, foot part of the bill for continued British protection, and stop cheating the Treasury by violating the Navigation Acts.” Nearly all Britons, moreover, believed that Parliament represented the entire empire and had a right to legislate for it, since the“virtual representation” theory—which held that each member represented the entire empire, not just his own district—was widely accepted. The British government and its appointed representatives in America, in addition, saw the empire as “a system of unequal parts in which different principles governed different areas, and all were subject to the authority of Parliament.” To surrender the right to tax the colonies, in their opinion, would set “a dangerous precedent for the empire as a whole.” For all of the reasons above, when the British Parliament levied taxes on the colonies, no British would ever consider this as a violation of the freedom of the colonies.

However, the colonial elite believed that the British Parliament challenged their authority over raising and spending money by imposing taxes without their consent. These elites defended this authority in the name of defending freedom. They invoked “the rights of the freeborn Englishman”, which they believed the colonists should enjoy, and drew on “time-honored British principles” (including “a community’s right not to be taxed except by its elected representatives”). They claimed that if property can be taken away "without consent," freedom will not be guaranteed. More and more colonists tended to think that "Britain had no right to tax them at all, since Americans were unrepresented in the House of Commons" - or, "no taxation without representation." The resolutions written by Patrick Henry, which were then approved by Virginia’s House of Burgesses, insisted that the colonists enjoyed the same “liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities” as

residents of the mother country and that the right to consent to taxation was a cornerstone of “British freedom.” Therefore, the Sugar Act was unpopular in the colonies, being seen as a force collection of tax that could have been evaded. After the introduction of the Stamp Law, “no word was more frequently invoked by critics of the Stamp Act than ‘liberty’.” John Adams once wrote that the Stamp Act had inspired “the people, even to the lowest ranks,” to become “more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known.” A group of opponents of the tax law, known as the "Sons of Liberty," posted notices reading “Liberty, Property, and No Stamps” and took the lead in enforcing the boycott of British imports. Later, the Townshend Act had caused dissatisfaction among many businessmen, and several colonial leaders continued to impose restrictions on goods imported from the UK. The Tea Act triggered the tea-drinking incident in Boston, which led to the introduction of the Intolerance Acts, eventually leading the colonies to unite and rebel against British rule.

National unity

For the viewpoint of the United Kingdom, maintaining the unity of the entire country was part of the responsibilities of the colonies. The British were also glorified and proud of the membership of the British Empire, so did many colonists. Many political leaders, especially in colonies that had experienced internal turmoil, feared that “a complete break with the mother country might unleash further conflict.” For one thing, anarchy from below, in their view, was “as much a danger as tyranny from above”; for another, as Joseph Galloway, a Pennsylvania leader and delegate to the Second Continental Congress, warned, independence would be accompanied by “constant disputes within America.” It was Paine’s "Common Sense" that changed the situation. Paine criticized the British monarchy in the leaflet as a tyranny system, ridiculed the condition that “a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island,” and envisioned an independent America as “an asylum for mankind.” Paine’s views spread widely throughout the colonies, laying a solid foundation for the independence of British North America.

(4) The Slave System (British North America)

The famous or infamous slave system has a history nearly as long as that of human-being. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the African continent had already implemented slavery[4]. Traditionally, African slaves tended to be “criminals, debtors, and captives in war”. Working within the households of their owners, they had well-defined rights, such as “possessing property and marrying free persons.” It was hardly uncommon for African slaves to become free. Also, the history of American Slavery predated the coming of Europeans. In both cases, however, slavery was a supplement source of labor, by no means was the basis of the whole economic system.

In North America colonies, in contrast, due to the continuous expansion of tobacco planting, the demand for labor continued to increase, and the problem of lack of plantation labor needed to be resolved. Instead of using Indians Slaves or indentured servants in large scale, the British America government decided to introduce slaves from Africa for certain reasons: the number of Indians was plummeting, and the Indians was relatively easy to escape since they were familiar with the terrain; indentured servants could seek the protection of the English common law and their duration of “slavery” was not life-long; Blacks unique skin color would prevent them from fleeing, and they adapted to high-intensity labor. With the experience of instituting black slavery system from other parts of the Western Hemisphere, planters and government authorities convinced that importing African slaves was the best way to solve their persistent shortage of labor. With the Indian population having been wiped out by disease, and with the white indentured servants unwilling to do the back-breaking, monotonous work of sugar cultivation, came the massive importation of slaves. It is estimated that 7.7 million Africans were transported to the New World between 1492 and 1820 as slaves.

For slavery, the views of different groups were not the same. The Indians had always cherished their freedom, having a strong resistance to slavery. After the Seven Years' War, the Indians regarded the continued expansion of Britain as a threat, and the Pontiac uprising against the British broke out. Britain in the 18th century prided itself on being the freest country. In their view, freedom was their exclusive wealth. They saw themselves as beacon of freedom throughout Europe.

The English had long “viewed alien peoples with disdain.” This was especially true for Africans, who were long regarded from a lower race. An anti-black stereotype flourished in England. As a result, from the Britons perspective, Africans were suitable for slavery, and the British further limited the political rights of blacks. In the eyes of Africans, slavery deprived them of their personal freedom and the pursuit of happiness, leaving them in endless heavy labor and poor living conditions. They were full of yearning and expectation for returning to Africa to live freely. Many slaves resisted slavery at the expense of life.

4. Conclusion

This paper compares the differences in the "views of freedom" between Europeans, Indians, and Africans. It shows the complex "American freedom" of different groups before the founding of the United States, reflecting the complexity and diversity of early American history.

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