Chapter 11: Cotton, Slavery and the Old South
The Growth of Slavery

- 1808: Congress outlaws slave trade
  - Results in a greater emphasis on ‘breeding slaves’ as well as recapturing runaways.
- 1818: Frederick Douglass born; slavery was already an old institution in America.
  - Two centuries had passed since the first 20 Africans landed in Virginia from a Dutch ship.
  - “peculiar institution” of the South – that is, an institution unique to Southern society.
- 1836 Gag Rule: introduced by John C. Calhoun to hush discussion in the Senate on slavery. Repealed in 1844.
- On the eve of the Civil War, the slave population in American had grown from the original 20 to 4 million
The Growth of Slavery

- In the South as a whole, slaves made up $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total population and in the cotton producing states of the Deep South about $\frac{1}{2}$.
- 1850: Slavery had crossed the Mississippi River and was expanding rapidly in AR, LA, and eastern TX.
- 1860: $\frac{1}{3}$ of the nation’s cotton crop was grown west of the Mississippi River.
“Cotton is King”

- The Old South was the largest and most powerful slave society the modern world has known.
- Its strength rested on a virtual monopoly of cotton, the South’s “white gold.”
- By the 19th century, cotton had assumed an unprecedented role in the world economy.
  - About ¾ of the world’s cotton supply came from the Southern USA.
- 1830: Cotton had become the most important American export.
  - On the eve of the Civil War, it represented well over ½ the total of American exports.
- 1860: The economic investment represented by the slave population exceeded the value of the nation’s factories, railroads, and banks combined.
Slave Politics and the Nation

- The “free states” had ended slavery, but they were hardly unaffected by it.
- The Constitution enhanced the power of the South in the House of Representatives and Electoral College and required all states to return fugitive slaves from bondage (3/5 Compromise/Fugitive Slave Clause)
- Northern merchants and manufacturers participated in the slave economy and shared in the profits.
- Money earned in the cotton/slave trade helped finance industrial development in the North.
- Northern ships carried cotton to NY and Europe, northern bankers financed cotton plantations, north companies insured slave property, and northern factories turned cotton into cloth.
- Northern manufacturers supplied cheap fabrics (“Negro cloth”) to clothe the South’s slaves.
Slave Politics and the Nation

- Slavery led the South down a very different path of economic development than the North, limiting the growth of industry, discouraging immigrants from entering the region, and inhibiting technological progress.
- Southern banks existed primarily to help finance the plantations.
- Southern railroads mostly consisted of small lines that brought cotton from the interior to coastal ports.
- The South produced less than 10% of the nation’s manufactured goods.
- Yet the South’s economy was hardly stagnant, and slavery proved very profitable for most owners.
- Slavery’s economic centrality for the South and the nation as a whole formed a powerful obstacle to abolition.
- Senator James Henry Hammond of SC declared, “No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.”

Slavery and Cotton Production

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Southern Society

The Planter Aristocracy

- The South was ruled politically and economically by wealthy plantation owners.
- 1850: Only 1,733 families owned more than 100 slaves; yet they dominated Southern politics.
- The South was the least democratic region of the country.
- There was a huge gap between rich and poor.
- South had a very poor public education system thus planters sent their children to private schools.
- Planters carried on the “cavalier” tradition of early VA.
- Planters: a landed genteel class
Southern Society

The Southern White Majority

- 75% of white Southerners owned no slaves.
- Mostly subsistence farmers and did not participate in the market economy.
- Poorest were called “white trash”, “hillbillies”, or “crackers.”
- Fiercely defended the slave system as it proved white superiority.
- Poor whites took comfort that they were “equal” to the planter class.
- They hoped someday to own slaves.
- Slavery proved effective in controlling blacks and ending slavery might result in race mixing and blacks competing with whites for jobs.
Free Blacks in the South vs. the North

✧ By 1860 there were nearly 250,000 ‘free blacks’ in the South.

✧ Border states started the process of emancipation in the early 1800s. Most of the border states were undergoing a shifting of agriculture away from tobacco.

✧ In the Lower (Deep) South most free blacks were mulattos - mixed white and black. They were discriminated against in both white and black communities as they symbolized the dark nature of the slave system: sexual intimidation and rape.

✧ In the North, free blacks were also around 250,000 in total number.

✧ They were routinely denied any form of education and state suffrage (right to vote). Most facilities were segregated by race.

✧ Racism was more violent and intense towards blacks in the North. The Irish in particular would attack free blacks as they were viewed as competition for low wage work.

“The distinction between slave and the free is not great.”

Frederick Douglass
Pro-Slavery Ideology

• In the 30 years before the outbreak of the Civil War, even as Northern criticism of the “peculiar institution” began to deepen, pro-slavery thought came to dominate Southern public life.

• Fewer and fewer white Southerners shared the view, common among the Founding Fathers, that slavery was, at best, “a necessary evil.”

• Rather they viewed it as a “positive good.”

1837: John C. Calhoun:

“Many in the South once believed that slavery was a moral and political evil... That folly and delusion are gone; we see it now in its true light, and regard it as the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world.”
PRO-SLAVERY IDEOLOGY

Key Pillars of Pro-Slavery argument:

1. **Racism** – the belief that blacks were innately inferior to whites and unsuited for life in any conditions other than slavery – formed one pillar of the pro-slavery ideology.

2. Most slaveholders also found legitimation for slavery in **Biblical** passages such as the injunction that servants should obey their masters.

3. Others argued that slavery was **essential to human progress**. Without slavery, planters would be unable to cultivate the arts, sciences, and other civilized pursuits.

4. Still other defenders of slavery insisted that the institution **guaranteed equality for whites** by preventing the growth of a class doomed to the life of unskilled labor.
Southern Pro-Slavery Propaganda

THE NEGRO IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

THE NEGRO IN AMERICA.
SLAVES AND THE LAW

* Before the law, slaves were property and the constant fear that families would be destroyed by being sold away is slavery’s greatest psychological horror.

* Although they had a few legal rights (all states made it illegal to kill a slave except in self-defense)

* Slaves could be sold or leased by their owners at will and lacked any voice in the governments that ruled them.

* By 1830, it was a crime to teach a slave to read or write. Not all of the laws were rigorously enforced.

  * Some members of slaveholding families taught children to read and write – although rather few since well over 90% of the slave population was illiterate in 1860.
SLAVE LABOR

- Slavery was a system of labor, “from sunup to first dark”

- The majority of slaves – 75% of women and nearly 90% of men – worked in the fields.

- Typical day was 16-18 hours of work
MAINTAINING ORDER

* Owners encouraged and exploited divisions among slaves, especially between field hands and house servants.

* They created a system of incentives that rewarded good work with time off or even payments – in Virginia a slaveholder paid 10 cents a day for good work.

* Any infraction of plantation rules, no matter how minor, could be punished by the lash.
THE “CRIME” OF CELIA

• Celia was a slave who killed her master while resisting a sexual assault (1855)

• Missouri state law deemed “any woman” in such circumstances to be acting in self-defense.

• But, the Court ruled that Celia was not a woman.

• She was a slave, whose master had complete power over her person.

• The Court sentenced her to death.

• However, since Celia was pregnant, her execution was postponed until her child had been born, so as to not deprive her owner’s heir of their property rights.
As the 19th century progressed, some southern states enacted laws to prevent the mistreatment of slaves, and their material living conditions improved.

With the price of slavery rising, it made economic sense for owners to become concerned with the health and living conditions of their human property.

Improvements in the slaves’ living conditions were meant to strengthen slavery, not undermine it.

Even as the material conditions and health of slaves improved, the South drew tighter and tighter the chains of bondage.

More and more states set limits on voluntary manumission, requiring such acts be approved by the legislature.

Few slave societies in history have so systematically closed all avenues to freedom as the Old South.
THE SLAVE FAMILY

The law did not recognize the legality of slave marriages.

- The Master had to consent before a man and woman could “jump over the broomstick” (the slaves’ wedding ceremony), and families stood in constant danger of being broken up by sale.

- Nonetheless, most adult slaves married, and their unions, when not disrupted by sale, typically lasted a lifetime.
THE SLAVE FAMILY

- Because of constant sales, the slave community had a significantly higher number of female-headed families than among whites, as well as families in which grandparents, other relatives, or even non-kin assumed responsibility for raising children.

- Origin of strong female head of house in Afr. American families

- As the domestic slave trade expanded with the rise of the Cotton Kingdom, about one marriage in three in slave-selling states like VA was broken by sale.

- Fear of sale permeated slave life, especially in the Upper South.

- As a reflection of their paternalistic responsibilities, some owners encouraged slaves to marry.
SLAVE RELIGION

* To masters, Christianity offered another means of social control.

* Many required slaves to attend services conducted by white ministers, who preached that theft was immoral and that the Bible required servants to obey their masters.

* One slave later recalled being told in a white minister’s sermon “how good God was in bringing us over to this country from dark and benighted Africa, and permitting us to listen to the sound of the gospel.”

* But the slaves transformed the Christianity they had embraced, turning it to their own purposes.

* A blend of African traditions and Christian belief, slave religion was practiced in secret nighttime gatherings on plantations and in “praise meetings” replete with shouts, dances, and frequent emotional interchanges between the preacher and congregation (Call and Response)
SLAVE RELIGION

* The Biblical story of the Exodus played a central role in black Christianity.

* Slaves identified themselves as a chosen people, who God in the fullness of time would deliver from bondage.

* Also, the figure of Jesus Christ represented to slaves a personal redeemer, one who truly cared for the oppressed.

* Despite merging Christian beliefs with their own African traditions, most slaves did worship an image of Jesus is a Anglo-Saxon image whereas their African counterparts often portrayed Jesus as black.
The Cult of Domesticity

- As production moves outside the home, the value of the home changes.
- Domestic responsibilities become more based around child rearing and cleaning and less about production/money.
- Consider the difference from the Rev. Era.
- Developed to control a rapidly changing world - spheres of influence.