

THE SLAVERY ISSUE

I. The rise of "King Cotton"

- A. Prior to 1793, the Southern economy was weak: depressed prices, unmarketable products, over-cropped lands, and an unprofitable slave system. -- Jefferson (who freed 10% of his slaves) spoke of freeing their slaves and of slavery gradually dying; "We have a wolf by the ears"
- B. Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin (1793)
 - 1. Impact: Cotton production now profitable; 50x more effective than picking cotton by hand.
 - 2. Cotton Kingdom developed into a huge agricultural factory → Western expansion into lower gulf states resulted (LA, MS, AL)
- C. Trade
 - 1. Cotton exported to England; \$ from sale of cotton used to buy northern goods -- Britain heavily dependent on cotton to feed its textile factories (80% came from U.S.)
 - 2. Cotton accounted for 50% of all American exports after 1840

II. The Three Souths

- A. Generalizations
 - 1. The further North, the cooler the climate, the fewer the slaves, and the lower the commitment to perpetuating bondage.
 - 2. The further South, the warmer the climate, the more the slaves, and the higher the commitment to perpetuating bondage.
 - 3. Not a unified South EXCEPT on unity resulting from outside interference
- B. **Border South:** Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, & Missouri
 - 1. Plantations scarcer; cotton cultivation almost nonexistent; Tobacco main slave crop (as in Middle South); More grain production (as in Middle South)
- C. **Middle South:** Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas.
 - 1. Each state had one section resembling more the Border South and another resembling the Lower South.
- D. **Lower South:** South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas -- Most slaves concentrated in the "black belt" of the Deep South along river valleys
 - 1. Plantations prevalent; cotton was king; grew 95% of Dixie's cotton & almost all of its sugar, rice, and indigo.

III. The Planter "Aristocracy"

- A. South an oligarchy -- Ruled by wealthy plantation owners
 - 1. Stifled democracy, widened gap between rich & poor, and hampered public education (planters sent kids to private schools)
 - 2. Chivalry, honor, hospitality, soft-spoken, courteous; yet high-strung

IV. Slaves and the slave system (the "Peculiar Institution")

- A. Plantation system
 - 1. Risky: Slaves might die of disease, injure themselves, or run away. -- System required heavy investment of capital
 - 2. One-crop economy
 - a. Discouraged a diversification of agriculture and esp. manufacturing
 - b. Resented being so dependent on northern manufactures & markets

3. Repelled large-scale European immigration → Slave labor far cheaper, fertile land very expensive, & Europeans unfamiliar with cotton production.

B. Plantation slavery

1. Nearly 4 million slaves by 1860; quadrupled in number since 1800
2. Slaves seen as valuable assets and primary source of wealth
 - a. Slave auctions one of most revolting aspects of slavery
 - i. Families often separated: division of property, bankruptcy
 - ii. Slavery's greatest psychological horror
3. Punishment often brutal to send a message to other slaves not to defy master's authority
4. Afro-American slave culture developed

C. Burdens of slavery

1. Slaves deprived of dignity and sense of responsibility that free people have, suffered cruel physical and psychological treatment, and were ultimately convinced that they were inferior and deserved their lot in life.
2. Denied an education; seen as dangerous to give slaves ideas of freedom
3. Slaves often insidiously sabotaged their master's system -- Poisoned food, supplies often missing, equipment often broken, slow work.
4. Many attempted to escape -- Some success in Border South; next to impossible in Lower South

D. Slave Revolts

1. Stono Rebellion, 1739 -- South Carolina slaves fled toward Florida killing whites along way; did not make it.
2. Gabriel Prosser, 1800
 - a. Slave blacksmith in VA who planned a military slave revolt; recruited 150 men
 - b. Rebellion did not materialize and Prosser and 26 others were hanged.
3. Denmark Vesey, a mulatto in Charleston, devised the largest revolt ever in 1822.
 - a. A slave informer advised his master of the plot
 - b. Vesey and 30 others publicly hanged
4. Nat Turner's revolt -- 1831
 - a. Sixty Virginians slaughtered, mostly children and women
 - i. Wave of killing slowed down revolt's aim of capturing armory
 - ii. Largest slave revolt ever in the South
 - b. Over 100 slaves were killed in response; Turner was hanged.
 - c. Significance: Produced a wave of anxiety among southern plantation owners that resulted in harsh laws clamping down further on the slave institution.

E. Southern white paranoia

1. Feared more reprisals by slaves (like Nat Turner's revolt)
2. Infuriated by abolitionist propaganda in the North they saw as enflaming slaves.
3. Settled into a theory of biological racial superiority as a justification for slavery.