Chapter 12: The South Expands: Slavery and Society, 1820-1860

- **Creating the Cotton South**

  - The Cotton South evolved from the tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake and in the rice fields of the Carolina Low Country.

  - From there it grew into the sugar fields of LA and the hemp farms of KY and TN, and most importantly, into the cotton plantations of the states bordering the Gulf of Mexico.

  - Because of this evolution, American planters sought to continue this expansion of slavery – either across the continent or to the Caribbean.

- **The Domestic Slave Trade**

  - Extensive use of slavery was expanding rapidly.

    - In 1790, its western border was halfway through Georgia.

    - By 1830, it stretched through Louisiana.

    - And by 1860, it had gone as far so as to have been deep in Texas.

  - The number of southern states nearly doubled from 1800 to 1850, going from 8 to 15.

    - This led to an increased demand for slaves.

      - This new demand for workers first had planters turning to Africa.

        - However, Africa could not meet those demands because Congress had outlawed the Atlantic slave trade.

      - Next, they turned to the Chesapeake region, where approximately half the slaves in the US were located in 1800.

        - For example, the number of slaves that were bought and relocated from Virginia to the “Lower South” are as follows (average per decade)…

          - 1810s – 75,000

          - 1820s – 75,000

          - 1830s – 120,000

          - 1840s – 85,000

          - 1850s – 85,000

        - By 1860, more than 1 million slaves had been forced to leave the Upper South.

        - The movement of African Americans during this time could be divided into either “transfer”
or “sale”.

- **The Coastal and Inland Networks**

  - The Domestic Slave trade was just as complex a system as the Atlantic Slave Trade system.

  - It took the form of two main networks, the coastal system through the Atlantic seaports and the inland commerce using river and roads.

  - The coastal network was a system developed by slave traders in which the goal was to meet the insatiable demand for male labor in the sugar fields of LA.

  - In this system, slave traders scoured the countryside near port cities for able bodied slaves that could work well in “the New Orleans market.

  - This slave traffic was highly visible, and thus it elicited widespread condemnation by northern abolitionists.

  - The inland network in slaves for the Cotton South was much less visible, but far more extensive than that of the coastal network.

  - In this system, slave owners sold to other slave owners when they sought to make a profit or sought to climb out of debt.

  - The domestic slave trade was crucial to the prosperity of the southern economy.

  - It not only brought wealth to plantation owners in the “Lower South”, but also to those in the “Upper South”, who added an average of about 20% to their income from the sale of their slaves.

- **The Impact on Slave Families**

  - The domestic slave trade had a disastrous impact on slaves’ status as property, and on slave families.

  - Slave owners knew that property rights were key to slave discipline, and many would keep their control over their slaves not by whipping, but by threatening to sell them southward.

  - This threat was extremely effective.

  - The sheer size of the domestic slave trade meant that it touched thousands of families and destroyed about ¼ of all slave marriages.

  - Despite the challenges married slaves faced, almost 80% of slave marriages remained unbroken, and the majority of children lived with one or both parents until they reached puberty.

  - Knowing that either partner could be sold at any time, slave marriages altered the traditional phrase of “until death do you part” by replacing it with the phrase, “for so long
as God keeps them together.”

- Because of the enduring percentages of slave marriages, many white slave owners saw themselves as somewhat benevolent masters, because they “were committed to the welfare of “my family, black and white.””

- Most southerners never questioned the domestic slave trade, stating that it was “completely consistent “with moral principle and with the highest order of civilization.””

- The Dual Cultures of the Planter Elite

- The westward movement of planters had a profound impact on the small elite of extraordinarily wealthy planter families who stood at the top of economic classes in the south.

- On the eve of the Civil War, these men made up 2/3 of all American men with wealth of $100,000.

- The two types of the planter elite that existed were…

- The traditional aristocratic planters in the Old South, who had grown rich planting tobacco and rice, and lived in expensive mansions.

- The market-driven entrepreneurs in the New South, whose wealth was coming from the booming cotton industry and usually lived in modest houses.

- Slave-Owning Aristocrats

- In the 1700s, a wealth planter elite came to dominate the social and political life of the Tidewater region of the Chesapeake and the low country of SC and GA.

- Their culture survived the Revolution of the late 18th century, and their English landed gentry manners and values continued on.

- Most planters cast themselves as republican aristocrats, which criticized the increasingly democratic polity and egalitarian society, especially as they were developing in the Northeast and Midwest.

- In order to maintain their exclusivity, aristocratic planters married their children to children of other aristocratic planters, and taught them to follow in their footsteps (becoming a planter, lawyer, etc.)

- They also confirmed their social dominance by building extravagant homes and throwing plantation parties.

- There were two strategies that allowed these slave-owning aristocrats of the Old South to still live lavishly in times when their crops’ industry was doing so well…

1. Selling some of their slaves.

2. Working the remaining slaves even harder.
- This aristocracy was different in tobacco-growing regions and in the periphery of the south (VA, SC, and LA), where many slave owners found they did not need them anymore and would either sell them, rent them out, or allow them to purchase their freedom.

- Many planters took the ideology of *pater-familias* to heart in which the head of the family should be the father to whole plantation…

  - Many planters began to intervene more often in the lives of their slaves...

    - They built cabins for them.
    - Insisted they be whitewashed regularly.
    - Many supervised the religious activities of their laborers.
    - Built churches on plantations, and often required their slaves to attend.

- Many southern apologists sought religious justification for human bondage, stating that the bible never condemned slavery.

- Also, many of these wealthy planters were absentee owners, and rarely glimpsed the day-to-day brutality of the slave regime.

- Slave-Owning Entrepreneurs

  - The slave owners in the New South faced much less hypocrisy although their treatment of slaves was much worse.

    - As one slave owner said, “Land has to be cultivated wet or dry, Negros [must] work, hot or cold.”

    - As a result, many slaves grew “mean” and stubborn.

  - Cotton was such a demanding crop because it had an extremely long growing season. Slaves…

    - Plowed the land in March.
    - Dropped seeds into the ground in early April.
    - Once the plants started to grow, had to continually chop away the surrounding grasses.
    - And when the cotton was ready to be picked, the four-month picking season began.

- To increase profits and outputs, plantation owners developed the gang-labor system.

  - This system organized disciplined teams, or “gangs,” supervised by black drivers and white overseers.

  - It instructed drivers and overseers to use the lash to work the gangs at a steady pace,
clearing and plowing land or hoeing and picking cotton.

- The gang-labor system allowed slaves to get done in 35 minutes what normally took an hour, producing impressive profits and becoming ever more prevalent.

- During the 1850s, the number of planters using gang labor increased by 70% and their wealth soared.

- This was, no doubt, because of the 2 million enslaved African Americans now working on the plantations in the Cotton South, which now annually produced 4 million bales of cotton.

- Planters, Smallholding Yeomen, and Tenants

- Although the South was a “slave society”, meaning that all aspects of life were affected by slavery, the majority of white southerners did not own slaves.

- Whilst the number of slave owners increased, the rest of the population increased faster. It went from…

  - 36% in 1830 to…
  - 31% in 1850 to…
  - 25% in 1860.

- 5% of the south population owned twenty or more slaves, but together, they owned over 50% of the entire slave population of 4 million, and their plantations grew 50% of the South’s cotton crop.

- These planters had an average wealth of $56,000, compared to the average wealth of a yeomen farmer, which was $3,200.

- Another 40% of the slaves were owned by the growing “middle class” proprietors.

- Lawyers also benefitted greatly from the south’s dependence on slavery, many became wealthy by handling the legal affairs of elite planters, representing merchants and storekeepers in suit for debt, and settling disputes over property.

- The last 10% of slaves were owned by the smallholders, who often worked the fields with their slaves and whose numbers made up the majority of the slave owning population.

- Most fathers had total authority in the household, however, whatever the extent of their authority that was; most yeomen lived and died hard-scrabble farmers. They worked alongside their slaves in the fields, struggled to make ends meet as their families grew, and moved frequently in search of economic opportunity.

- Other smallholders gained too much debt, and were forced to sell their land and their slaves in order to become propertyless tenants.

- Rejecting the white superiority sort of society that many southern counties had become,
many southern whites fled planter-dominated counties and sought farms in the Appalachian hill country and beyond – in western VA, KY, TN, MO, and the southern regions of IL and IN.

- They sought to reestablish a simple life in which they could provide for themselves, have some say in the local government, and all-in-all to hope for a life of independence and dignity by moving north or farther west, where labor was “free” and hard work was considered respectable.

• The Politics of Democracy

- Despite their economic and social dominance, the planter elite did not dominate the political life of the Cotton South.

  - For example, the Alabama Constitution of 1819 granted suffrage to all white men; it also provided for a secret ballot, apportionment based on population, and the election of county supervisors, sheriffs, and clerks of the courts.

- Given this democratic ethos, political factions had to compete with each other for votes and control of local and state governments.

• Cultivating Popular Support

- To gain favor among votes, Alabama Democrats nominated candidates and endorsed low taxes and other policies that would command popular support.

- The Whigs, who were their current opponents in the Second Party System, garnered votes by continuing to advocate government support for banks, canals, roads, and other internal improvements; but they also elected candidates who appealed to the common people.

- Whatever their social rank, Alabama legislation usually enacted policies that reflected the interests of the salve-owning population.

  - In Alabama, more taxes were levied against the rich than the poor. However, in many other southern states, this was not the case, especially when many planter elite used their political influence to exempt slave property from taxation.

• Attempts at Economic Diversification

- The booming cotton market discouraged economic diversification.

- Wealthy southerners continued to invest in land and slaves, when they should have been investing in a series of technological innovations – water- and steam-powered factories, machine tools, steel plows, and macadamized roads – that would have raised the region’s productivity.

  - Cotton remained “King”.

- Slavery also deterred economic diversification through industrialization because many poor immigrants refused to migrate south because they feared they would be treated like slaves.
Thus, despite the South’s expansion in territory and exports, in 1860, it remained an economic colony of Great Britain and the North, which bought its staple crops and provided its manufactures, financial services, and shipping facilities.

In contrast to the North, almost 84% of southerners worked in agriculture, and southern factories only churned out 10% of the nation’s manufactured goods.

- **The African American World**

  - By the 1820s, African American culture was a mixture of American and African cultures.

  - The African side to this continued on because they were denied access to the way of life in the American society, and so they still sought to express themselves.

  - **Evangelical Black Protestantism**

    - A black form of Christianity exemplified the synthesis of African and American cultures.

    - Evangelical Protestantism came to the south in the late 18th century in the Second Great Awakening, and they welcomed black converts.

    - Other Protestant crusaders were pious black men and women, who had been converted whilst enslaved in the Chesapeake region, and then were sold in the domestic slave trade to the south.

    - Here they carried their emotional evangelical message of conversion, ritual baptism, and communal spirituality.

    - Enslaved Christians often pointed out that masters and slaves were “children of God” and should be dealt with according to the Golden Rule.

    - Black preachers also generally ignored the original doctrines of sin and predestination as well as biblical passages that encourage unthinking obedience to authority.

    - These new religious beliefs were those that caused Nat Turner to lead a bloody rebellion against slavery in Virginia.

    - By African-influenced means, black congregations devised a distinctive and joyous brand of Protestant worship to sustain them on the long journey to emancipation and the Promised Land.

- **Slave Society and Culture**

  - Black Protestantism represented only one facet of an increasingly homogenous African-American culture, which could even be seen in SC, a major point of entry for recently imported slaves.

  - The domestic slave trade also significantly reduced cultural differences.

  - Although the black culture was becoming more similar to that of the white American’s; they
still had somewhat of an African feel to it.

- This could be seen in the Congo Dance, which was brought over by slaves from the Congo region of West-Central Africa.

**Marriage and Kinship Relations**

- African Americans continued to shun marriage between cousins, which was not an influence from whites, because they frequently married cousins so as to keep wealth in a family.

- Slave unions, however, went unrecognized by the law.

  - This was because southern legislature and courts prohibited legal marriages among slaves so that they could be sold without breaking a legal bond.

  - In response, however, many slaves did have their marriages conducted secretly by a Christian minister.

- Although the domestic slave trade separated many families; it did not destroy slaves’ family values.

  - This could be seen when elderly slaves were brought into slave communities and were adopted as “aunts” and “uncles.”

- The fictional kinship networks were part of a complex community-building process – naming children was another.

  - Children were often given African names, to solidify ties with their ancestors’ homeland, other times they were given British names, to show their assimilation into American culture, and lastly, many were given a name of one of their relatives, showing how tight these family groups were.

- Some slaves eventually won the right to labor by the “task” rather than to work under constant supervision.

  - This meant that each laborer would have a precisely defined job – such as hoeing a half-acre, and when they finished they would be done for the day.

  - However, those operating under the gang-labor system were not as lucky, and their working conditions continued to be brutal and inhumane.

**Resistance**

- Planters were under the constant fear of slave rebellion, especially in states where the slave population was greater than that of the whites.

- Slave resistance seriously limited slave owners power of them.

  - They would feign illness or lose/break tools and therefore slow down the process of
- They would refuse to be sold unless they were sold as a family, and if they were split up, relatives would retaliate by burning down buildings, poisoning food, etc.

- Also, the constant pressure of abolitionists also slightly decreased slave owners’ powers over slaves.

- For all these reasons, it caused many slave owners to reduce their dependence on the whip.

- In lieu of whipping, many slave owners found it better to offer rewards for good service than punishment for bad.

- However, many still did resort to violence, and many masters continued to satisfy themselves sexually by raping their female slaves.

- Because slaves’ options of running away or rebelling were both bleak and full of problems, most were content to build the best possible lives for themselves on the plantations where they lived.

- The Free Black Population

- Many blacks managed to escape slavery through flight or manumission.

- The percentages of free blacks were…

- 8% from 1790-1819.

- 13% from 1820-1840.

- 11% from 1841-1860.

- Nearly half of these resided in the North.

- Those that resided in the north were either runaways or free blacks who feared reenslavement – in either case, they steered clear of the south.

- Even in the north, however, few blacks enjoyed unfettered freedom, because they were still treated as social inferiors, and many whites did all they could to confine them to low economic and political status.

- Some of the more famous free blacks were…

- Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) – mathematician and surveyor that published an almanac and helped lay out the new capital in the District of Columbia.

- Joshua Johnston (1765-1832) – an artist that won praise for his portraiture.

- Paul Cuffee (1759-1817) – a merchant who acquired a small fortune from business
- Horace King (1807-1885) – a master bridge builder, who was a self-made man from the south. He also served two terms as Republican member of the Alabama House of Representatives.

- The free black population in the slave states numbered approximately 94,000 in 1810 and 225,000 in 1860.

- Most of these people lived in coastal cities, and in the Upper south.

- To protect their free status, free blacks had to carry manumission documents, which did not necessarily protect them from being kidnapped and sold.

- A small percentage of free blacks eventually ended up owning slaves, so as to more assimilate into white American culture, and perhaps become more accepted.

- However, the majority of free blacks felt unity to the abolitionist movement, and many were integral figures in it.

- In the rigid caste system of American race relations, free blacks stood as symbols of hope to enslaved African Americans and as symbols of danger to most whites.