



## 13.2 THE AGRARIAN SOUTH AND THE SYSTEM OF SLAVERY

<p><b>THE SOUTHERN DIFFERENCE</b> <b>Cotton and Slavery</b></p>	<p>Despite many national, ethnic, and religious similarities, southerners and northerners were different. It was principally SLAVERY that distinguished the two regions. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, SOUTHERNERS MOVED INTO THE SOUTHWEST. The migration reflected the GROWING DOMINANCE OF COTTON, which adapted easily to a variety of climates and soils. Slaves cultivated 75 percent of cotton, and as the crop expanded, so did the SLAVE POPULATION, which reached approximately FOUR MILLION BY 1860. This extraordinary growth was the result of natural reproduction. By 1860, the South had the largest slave society in the New World.</p>
<p><b>White Supremacy</b></p> <p><b>Harsh Slave Codes</b></p> <p><b>Proslavery Argument: Positive Good</b></p>	<p>The presence of large numbers of African Americans generated DEEP-SEATED FEARS among whites, who in some parts of the South found themselves in the minority. Consequently, southern whites were dedicated to WHITE SUPREMACY and to maintaining a RACIAL HIERARCHY supported BY HARSH SLAVE CODES. As northern abolitionist attacks mounted during the 1830s, southern apologists constructed A PROSLAVERY ARGUMENT that claimed the institution was a "positive good" compared to the tyranny of northern capitalist "wage slavery." Not just planters and legislators promoted white supremacy; all white classes and professions had a stake in the system. Black SLAVERY HELPED WHITES BRIDGE DIFFERENCES in class, wealth, education, and culture. RACIAL SOLIDARITY made slave masters and non-slaveholders oppose black freedom and equality.</p>
<p><b>Racial Solidarity</b></p> <p><b>THE PLANTATION ECONOMY</b> <b>Planters: The Minority Dominated the So. Economy</b></p> <p><b>Cotton the Dominant Crop</b></p>	<p>Most southern whites worked small farms and only about 25 PERCENT OF WHITE FAMILIES OWNED SLAVES, most with fewer than five. Despite their minority status, PLANTERS DOMINATED THE SOUTHERN ECONOMY which remained agricultural in character. The main staples of southern agriculture were TOBACCO, SUGAR, RICE, and COTTON. Tobacco was the oldest plantation crop in North America. Sugarcane plantations were reputed to demand the hardest physical labor and required a great deal of money to fund. Rice was also expensive to cultivate and required large number of slaves. COTTON WAS THE DOMINANT CASH CROP because it was relatively easy to grow and took little capital to get started. Although nearly every southern farmer grew cotton, LARGE PLANTERS PRODUCED THREE-QUARTERS OF THE REGION'S COTTON and got the majority of the income from it.</p>
<p><b>Northern Intermediaries</b></p> <p><b>Contrast: Diversified North: (Agriculture, Commerce, Mfg)</b></p> <p><b>Agricultural South</b></p>	<p>The plantation economy was VERY PROFITABLE FOR PLANTERS, and it benefited the national economy as well. NORTHERNERS SERVED AS INTERMEDIARIES between planters and British textile mills, warehoused cotton, shipped it, and sold their manufactured goods in the southern market. Unfortunately for the South, nonagricultural forms of economic activity, especially manufacturing, developed slowly, if at all. What diversification existed was principally in the processing of raw materials. INDUSTRY REMAINED INSIGNIFICANT in comparison with the agricultural economy. Southerners were afraid that an industrial economy would upset the slave system. The South had NO REAL URBAN CENTERS equal to those in the North and very FEW IMMIGRANTS. While the North developed a diversified economy (agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing), the majority of white Southerners remained devoted to agriculture.</p>
<p><b>SOCIAL HIERARCHY</b> <b>Plantation Masters: Paternalistic</b></p>	<p>Though they varied in style, size, and other features, southern plantations shared one key characteristic. PLANTATION MASTERS DOMINATED SLAVES AND EVERYONE ELSE, including wives and children: they too were property. Most plantation masters conceived of their relationship with slaves as PATERNALISTIC. According to this view, slaves were given care and guidance in exchange for labor and obedience. However, moral obligation rarely entered into the picture. Planters provided enough food, clothing, and shelter</p>

	to sustain their slaves because slaves were VALUABLE PROPERTY. In addition, after the transatlantic slave trade was banned in 1808, masters realized the expansion of the slave labor force could come only from natural reproduction by healthy slaves.
<p><b>Obsessed with Honor</b></p> <p><b>Patriarchal</b></p> <p><b>Miscegenation v. Duty to Family</b></p>	<p>White southern men tended to be obsessed with their REPUTATION FOR HONOR, which contributed to the prominence of dueling as a part of southern culture. They were also expected to be proper PATRIARCHS. Within the big house, wives and children were expected to adhere to much of the same social hierarchy that governed the master-slave relationship. Masters' overwhelming power meant that southern laws against MISCEGENATION (sexual relations between persons of different races) were frequently broken. Nevertheless, DUTY TO FAMILY was very important. Slaveholders were bound together by marriage, ideology, and economic interest.</p>
<p><b><u>Plantation</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Mistresses:</u></b></p> <p><b>Companions &amp; Hostesses</b></p> <p><b>Nurturing Mothers Kept Subordinate</b></p>	<p>In some respects, affluent southern white women occupied roles similar to those of their northern counterparts. Their lives generally CENTERED ON THE HOME, where (according to the South's social ideal) they served as COMPANIONS AND HOSTESSES for their husbands and as NURTURING MOTHERS for their children. However, the obsession among the white male elite with chivalry meant that southern white women were KEPT SUBORDINATE in southern culture.</p>
<p><b>Ideal of Refined Southern Lady v. Reality of Daily Hard Work</b></p>	<p>Southern white women had other burdens as well. Most faced the impossible task of reconciling the IDEAL OF THE REFINED SOUTHERN LADY with the DAILY HARD WORK of helping to manage the plantation. A few southern white women rebelled against their roles and against their region's prevailing assumptions and even spoke out against slavery, as the Grimké sisters did. For an absorbing Real-Audio narration of a debate on these subjects (text is also included), see "The Grimke Sisters Debate Catherine Beecher About Anti-Slavery and Women's Rights" <a href="http://www.osv.org/education/docs/antislavery/grevils.htm">http://www.osv.org/education/docs/antislavery/grevils.htm</a></p>
	<p>Another problem was MISCEGENATION, with the children that slaveholders had with their female slaves serving as a constant reminder to white women of THEIR HUSBANDS' INFIDELITY. Most, however, expressed no open discontent because the mistress's world, like that of white children and slaves, was CONTROLLED BY THE PLANTATION MASTER. For an interesting article on the inflammatory nature of miscegenation in the 1860s, see "The Miscegenation Hoax" <a href="http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/miscegenation.html">http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/miscegenation.html</a> and "Miscegenation" <a href="http://www.africanana.com/Articles/tt_425.htm">http://www.africanana.com/Articles/tt_425.htm</a></p>
<p><b><u>Slaves:</u></b></p> <p><b>Non-Agricultural Occupations</b></p>	<p>By the mid-19th century, ONE IN EIGHT SLAVES could be found in virtually every skilled and unskilled occupation throughout the South, working in NONAGRICULTURAL POSITIONS as domestics, sailors, bakers, barbers, fishermen, railroad workers, and more. Still, the MAJORITY OF THE SOUTH'S SLAVES spent their lives working ON PLANTATIONS as field hands and house servants.</p>
<p><b>Field Hands</b></p> <p><b>Household Servants</b></p> <p><b>Skilled Artisans</b></p> <p><b>Slave-Drivers</b></p>	<p>Above all, slave owners wanted work from their slaves. Indeed, the desire for exploitable labor was the chief reason for slavery's origin in the New World as well as for its existence into the 19th century. The majority of slaves in 1860 were FIELD HANDS. Slaves worked hard, performing light tasks as children and then working in the fields at the age of eleven or twelve. The few slaves who became HOUSEHOLD SERVANTS had a somewhat easier life physically than field hands had but were constantly at the master's or mistress's beck and call. Rarer than house servants were slaves who worked as SKILLED ARTISANS for example, as blacksmiths, carpenters, millers, or shoemakers. They took pride in their skill and often showed what white owners felt was a disturbing independence of mind. A very small number of slaves served as DRIVERS, overseeing the labor of other slaves in the fields.</p>
<p><b><u>Slave Culture:</u></b></p> <p><b>Family, Religion, and Community</b></p>	<p>In their limited free time away from exhausting labor, slaves made the most of their families, religion, and communities. Although SLAVE MARRIAGES were not legally binding, some slave owners encouraged unions to promote stability as well as slaves' reproduction. However,</p>

	<p>the breakup of marriages and families by sale occurred all too frequently. Slave husbands and fathers did not have the same powers as free men, but they did what they could to protect and provide for their families. RELIGION provided another bulwark against the oppressiveness of slavery, although masters hoped that it would foster obedience. Often meeting secretly, slaves created A DISTINCTIVE VARIANT OF EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM, which incorporated ELEMENTS OF AFRICAN RELIGION and stressed those portions of the Bible that spoke to the ASPIRATIONS OF AN ENSLAVED PEOPLE thirsting for freedom. Slave sermons and religious songs spoke directly to the plight of a people held in bondage and implicitly asserted their right to be free.</p>
<p><b><u>Responses to Slavery:</u></b> <b>Adaptation, Resistance, and Rebellion</b></p>	<p>The black response to slavery was a combination of ADAPTATION and RESISTANCE. Resistance sometimes took the form of simple DEFIANT ACTS: sabotaging work by losing or breaking tools or performing tasks slowly or improperly. Thousands of slaves showed their discontent and desire for freedom BY RUNNING AWAY, a fraction making it to freedom in the North or Canada. For the majority, however, flight was not a real option because they lived too deep in the South to reach free soil. OPEN REBELLION was the most dramatic and clear-cut form of slave resistance, but it was rarely successful. A handful of conspiracies and attempted revolts in the antebellum period, the most notorious being Nat Turner's uprising in 1831, showed slaves' willingness to risk their lives in a desperate bid for liberation.</p>
<p><b>FREE BLACKS</b></p>	<p>Of the 4.1 MILLION BLACKS living in the South in 1860, approximately 6 PERCENT (260,000) WERE FREE. Whether they were in the North or the South, free blacks stood on dangerous middle ground and were often DENIED LEGAL AND POLITICAL EQUALITY with whites. They were SUBJECTED TO HUMILIATING RULES that confined their activities, limiting many to a life OF POVERTY AND DEPENDENCE as unskilled AGRICULTURAL LABORERS OR DOMESTIC SERVANTS. They were often forced to pay SPECIAL TAXES, to REGISTER ANNUALLY with the state, and to CARRY PAPERS proving their free status; in some states, they had to gain official PERMISSION TO TRAVEL from one county to another. Most SOUTHERN WHITES ABHORRED FREE AFRICAN AMERICANS, whose presence they believed undermined the racial hierarchy that was the essence of slavery.</p> <p>Despite laws restricting them, free blacks had some ADVANTAGES over enslaved ones. They COULD OWN PROPERTY, CHOOSE OCCUPATIONS, MARRY, AND PASS ON THEIR HERITAGE OF FREEDOM to their children. Free blacks varied in status. Most lived in poverty, but in a few cities, a small elite of usually light-skinned free blacks prospered. These men generally worked in skilled trades as TAILORS, MECHANICS, CARPENTERS, and such and were patronized by prominent whites who appreciated their skilled services. Thus, most free blacks, especially those who were "succeeding" in a hostile white world, found it necessary to appear loyal to the planter regime. Some successful free blacks EVEN OWNED SLAVES. On the whole, free blacks tried to keep a middle course, neither owning slaves nor inciting insurrection but just seeking to preserve their own freedom.</p>
<p><b>PLAIN FOLK</b></p>	<p>The TYPICAL WHITE SOUTHERNER was not a wealthy planter and slaveholder but a MODEST YEOMAN FARMER who owned his own land and did not have slaves. In the antebellum South, there were two yeoman societies, separated roughly along geographic lines.</p>
<p><b>Plantation-Belt Yeomen</b></p>	<p>Yeomen in the BLACK-BELT AND DELTA REGIONS lived in the midst of the plantation system and were linked to it in important ways. These small farmers, who grew mostly cotton, DEPENDED ON THE LOCAL PLANTATION ARISTOCRACY, which allowed them access to plantation gins and baling machines, helped them ship and sell their cotton, and extended a helping hand in all kinds of ways to poorer neighbors. In many areas, kinship networks also connected yeoman farmers with wealthy planters. These many links ensured that poorer farmers SHARED THE PLANTERS' COMMITMENT TO WHITE SUPREMACY, thus considerably lessening the potential for class conflict.</p>

<p><b>Upcountry Yeomen</b></p>	<p>The majority of the yeoman farmers located in the WESTERN PARTS of Virginia, North and South Carolina, northern Georgia, Alabama, and eastern Tennessee and Kentucky had a different economy and society from that in the plantation belt – an economy and society not dominated by slavery or large plantations. The HILLY GEOGRAPHY AND LACK OF TRANSPORTATION limited the prosperity of upcountry yeomen. Yeomen worked in family units. They devoted their efforts to growing SUBSISTENCE CROPS as well as a little cotton or tobacco, but production of these was limited by their geographic isolation. FORMAL EDUCATION WAS A LOW PRIORITY for most upcountry yeomen, who PREFERRED THE REVIVAL TENT TO THE SCHOOLROOM. Indeed, evangelical revivalism found its most receptive and largest audiences in the South among upcountry yeomen. Although they DID NOT BENEFIT DIRECTLY FROM SLAVERY, most yeomen and nonslaveholders SUPPORTED OR AT LEAST TOLERATED THE INSTITUTION.</p>
<p><b>Poor Whites</b></p>	<p>There were other white Southerners who did not benefit at all from the plantation economy: members of the CLASS OF POOR WHITES. Northerners argued that the slave system had shoved these whites so far down the social and economic ladder that they did not have the ambition to rise. Usually LANDLESS TENANT FARMERS OR DAY LABORERS, they LIVED IN SQUALOR. Their degradation resulted partly from DIETARY DEFICIENCIES and DISEASE. Although IMPOVERISHED, poor whites were not degenerate. Instead, many were ambitious people, scrambling to work their way up to become "respectable" yeoman farmers.</p>
<p><b>THE POLITICS OF SLAVERY</b></p>	<p>Southern politics, like much of southern society, reflected the impact of slavery. Throughout the antebellum period, POLITICAL POWER rested securely IN THE HANDS OF THE SLAVEHOLDING PLANTER ELITE. Although white yeoman farmers made up a vastly larger portion of the population, the planter elite was able to wield power far in excess of its actual numbers because most southern whites believed that the slave system benefited them.</p>
<p><b>Democratization</b></p>	<p>The political reforms of the Jacksonian era had a considerable impact on the South. By the early 1850s, every southern state had established UNIVERSAL WHITE MALE SUFFRAGE, and HIGH VOTER TURNOUT would become one of the hallmarks of southern politics. Thanks to democratization, southern politics also became INCREASINGLY PARTISAN as candidates vied for attention and votes. WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS COMPETED FAIRLY EQUALLY in the South, and both presented themselves AS CHAMPIONS OF THE PLAIN FOLK. However, Whigs tended to favor government intervention in the economy, while Democrats believed that government intervention was a threat to individual liberty and risked concentrating economic power in a few hands.</p>
<p><b>Planter Power</b></p>	<p>Whether Whig or Democrat, the MAJORITY OF SOUTHERN OFFICEHOLDERS WERE SLAVE OWNERS. The dominance of southern politics by the planter elite reflected the persistence of a CULTURE THAT VALUED TRADITION AND STABILITY and DEFERRED TO THE UPPER CLASSES in political matters. But tradition was not enough to ensure planter rule. Slaveholders had to convince the majority of plain folk that slavery and plantation agriculture benefited all southern whites, and they worked hard to cultivate the favor and votes of the common people.</p> <p>The massive representation of slaveholders meant that LEGISLATURES PRESERVED SLAVERY in a variety of ways. SLAVES WERE TAXED AT A LOWER RATE THAN LAND, and PUBLIC SUPPORT OF RAILROADS was beneficial primarily to large planters. Beginning in the 1830s, SLAVEHOLDERS CEASED TO TOLERATE CRITICISM and worked to suppress any arguments against slavery. CRITICS WERE CENSORED, OSTRACIZED, EVEN THREATENED. This could have a definite impact on poorer Southerners' awareness of attacks on slavery; southern politicians BANNED HINTON R. HELPER'S <i>THE IMPENDING CRISIS OF THE SOUTH</i>, which argued that poor whites were hurt by the slave system, at a time when poor whites were beginning to experience economic stagnation. In the antebellum South, democratization was able to occur simultaneously with growing political elitism.</p>

<p><b>A Slave Society</b></p>	<p>Southerners and Northerners regarded the South as fundamentally different from the rest of the nation. Nearly A THIRD OF THE REGION'S POPULATION WAS ENSLAVED, although the weight of bondage did not destroy black Americans. The SOUTH WAS OVERWHELMINGLY RURAL AND AGRARIAN, and its white population LARGELY AGREED THAT SLAVERY WAS NECESSARY AND JUST. During the 1850s, a dangerous division was emerging between the "slave" and "free" states.</p>
<p><b>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</b></p>	<p><b>Why did all classes of white southerners support white supremacy, harsh slave codes, and racial solidarity? What role did northern intermediaries play in perpetuating the institution of slavery?</b></p> <p><b>How did the social hierarchy of the South (with its plantation masters and mistresses, slaves, free blacks, and plain folk) reflect economic conditions in that section of the country? What advantages did free blacks have over slaves?</b></p> <p><b>How did the politics of slavery work to perpetuate the institution of slavery despite the trend toward democratization?</b></p>