

## CHAPTER ELEVEN COTTON, SLAVERY, AND THE OLD SOUTH

### Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter Eleven should enable the student to understand:

1. The significance of the shift of economic power from the "upper South" to the "lower South."
2. How cotton became "king," and the role it played in shaping the "southern way of life."
3. How trade and industry functioned under the southern agricultural system.
4. The structure of southern society, and the role of an enslaved people in that society.
5. The place of the South, with its increasing reliance on King Cotton, in the nation's economy.
6. The continuing historical debate over the South, its "peculiar institution," and the effects of enslavement on the blacks.

### Main Themes

1. How economic power shifted from the "upper" to the "lower" South, and the impact this had on southern social and political development.
2. How society in the South developed both in myth and in reality.
3. The nature of the South's "peculiar institution," and the effect it had on the southern way of life.

### Glossary

1. **planter:** A term used to identify one of those southerners whose combination of land and slaves was such that they stood out as the prominent staple producers in their area. A social as well as an economic designation, it was used to identify the agricultural elite in the South.
2. **manumission:** The act of freeing a slave.

### Pertinent Questions

#### THE COTTON ECONOMY (298-306)

1. What was "the most important economic development in the South of the mid-nineteenth century"? What caused this, and what was its economic impact?
2. What were the agricultural regions in the South, and what crops were grown in them?
3. How did cotton become "king" in the South, and what did this mean for the development of the region?
4. What role did the "business classes" of the South play in the region's economic development? What element was most important in this group? Why?
5. What do the authors mean by the statement that the antebellum South had a "colonial" economy?
6. What was the "cavalier" image, and how were southern planters able to create it?
7. Though only a small minority of southern whites owned slaves, the region was seen—both by the outside world and by many southerners themselves—as a society dominated by great plantations and wealthy landowning planters. How did this happen?
8. How did the idea of "honor" affect southern life in the years prior to the Civil War?

9. How was the role played by affluent southern white women like that of their northern counterparts? How was it different?
10. What accounted for the difference identified in question 9? Why did so few southern white women rebel against their role?
11. If "the typical white southerner was not a great planter," what was he? Describe and explain the way of life of the southern "plain folk."
12. Why did so few nonslaveholding whites oppose the slaveholding oligarchy? Where did these opponents live?

#### SLAVERY: THE "PECULIAR INSTITUTION" (306-313)

13. What were slave codes? What function did they serve? How were they applied, and what resulted from their violation?
14. How was slave life shaped by the slave's relationship with his or her owner?
15. Explain the "actual material condition of slavery" and the debate over it.
16. Were there "classes" among the slaves? What evidence is there to support this?
17. How did slavery in the cities differ from slavery on the plantation? What effect did urban slavery have on the "peculiar institution" and on the relationship between white and black?
18. How extensive was the practice of manumission in the South? What was the status of the freed slave in the South, and how did this compare with the status of freed people in the North?
19. Explain the characteristics of the foreign and domestic slave trade. On what grounds was this trade criticized, and how did the South answer this criticism?
20. How did the slave respond to slavery? What evidence exists to show that slaves did not accept their condition without protest and, in some cases, outright defiance?
21. What were the most widely recognized slave revolts? What did they accomplish?

#### THE CULTURE OF SLAVERY (313-316)

22. Explain how the process of adaptation helped slaves develop their own separate culture. How was this a form of resistance as well?
23. What role did language and music play in sustaining racial pride and unity for slaves?
24. What role did religion play in the life of slaves? What role did the slave family play?

#### WHERE HISTORIANS DISAGREE (309)

25. How have historical interpretations of the impact of slavery on the slaves evolved over the years?

26. What factors have shaped these historians' assessments?

#### PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE (314)

27. How did music both shape and reflect the lives of African Americans on slave plantations?

### Identification

Identify each of the following, and explain why it is important within the context of the chapter.

1. Long-staple cotton
2. Tredegar Iron Works
3. "factors"

4. De Bow's Review
5. "cavalier" image
6. planter aristocracy
7. Preston Brooks
8. the "Southern lady"
9. "crackers"
10. "Head driver"
11. task system/gang system
12. household servants
13. Elizabeth Keckley
14. "Sambo"
15. Gabriel Prosser
16. Nat Turner
17. underground railroad
18. "slave patrols"

#### Document 1

In the South, the plantation dominated the economy, much as industry did in the Northeast. Following is a description of and some observations on the plantation system and slave labor taken from the travel account of Frederick Law Olmsted. What similarities do you find between the regimentation of the factory workers at Lowell in the previous chapter and the status of the slaves? What differences exist? How might Thoreau have responded to what Olmsted described?

How did the objectives of the plantation owner differ from the objectives of those who owned the mills at Lowell? Might the plantation owner have argued that he offered his charges many of the same things as the factory? What analogy was the South fond of drawing between the factory and the plantation? What does this excerpt tell you about that analogy?

What evidence can you find to indicate classes among slaves? Read the section "Where Historians Disagree: The Character of Plantation Slavery," and consider how this excerpt relates to the theories advanced by Elkins, Fogel, and Engerman.

It is difficult to handle simply as property, a creature possessing human passions and human feelings, however debased and torpid the condition of that creature may be; while, on the other hand, the absolute necessity of dealing with property as a thing, greatly embarrassed a man in any attempt to treat it as a person. And it is the natural result of this complicated state of things, that the system of slave-management is irregular, ambiguous, and contradictory; that it is never either consistently humane or consistently economical.

As a general rule, the larger the body of negroes on a plantation or estate, the more completely are they treated as mere property, and in accordance with a policy calculated to insure the largest pecuniary returns. Hence, in part, the greater proportionate profit of such plantations, and the tendency which everywhere prevails in the planting districts to the absorption of small, and the augmentation of large estates. It may be true, that among the wealthier slave-owners there is often a humane disposition, a better judgment, and a greater ability to deal with their dependants indulgently and humanely, but the effects of this disposition are chiefly felt, even on those plantations where the proprietor resides permanently, among the slaves employed about the house and stables, and perhaps a few old favourites in the quarters. It is more than balanced by the difficulty of acquiring a personal

interest in the units of a large body of slaves, and an acquaintance with the individual characteristics of each. The treatment of the mass must be reduced to a system, the ruling idea of which will be, to enable one man to force into the same channel of labour the muscles of a large number of men of various and often conflicting wills.

Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom (London: Sampson Low, Son, 1862), p. 192.

#### Document 2

As the section "Where Historians Disagree" indicates, the South's "peculiar institution" has been debated for some time. Following is an excerpt from Joseph B. Cobb's Mississippi Scenes, published in 1851, that sheds some light on the question of the slave's response to slavery. Read it, and consider how it relates to the information and points of view presented in the text. From it determine, at least in this case, how slavery apparently changed blacks, and what elements of the system brought these changes about. In studying this question, reexamine Document 1. Would you call slavery a brutal system or, as many southerners (including Joseph B. Cobb) contended, a "positive good"?

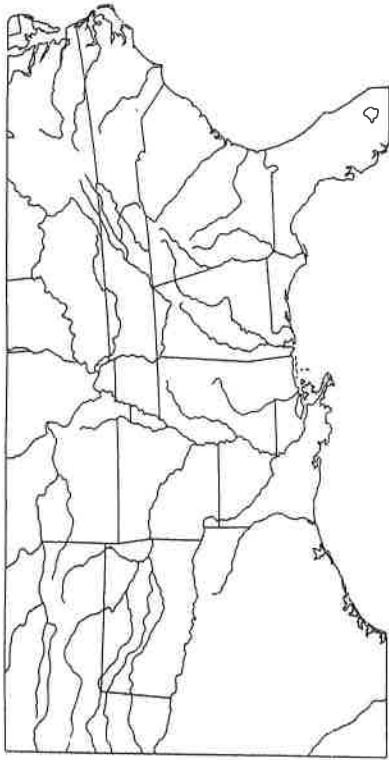
The late Hon. William H. Crawford, so affectionately and proudly remembered by all Georgians, owned four native Africans, brought to this country among the last importations of those unfortunate wretches who could be sold within the time prescribed by the Federal Constitution. . . . In the same neighborhood, there happened to be residing another native African, rather more Americanized than the first, and these five old fellows, especially as some of them bore on their faces the strange scars inflicted for some unknown distinguishing purpose in their native country, were treated with marked respect by all the other negroes for miles and miles around. . . . Their illustrious owner himself always treated them with rather more kindness of manner and respect than his other slaves, and would never allow them to be subjected to the lash except in case of downright resistance to the authority of his overseer (and this was a fault with them occasionally); and even then with manifest reluctance, and only from imperative convictions of duty. Their habits and dispositions were as unlike those of our native negroes as it is possible to conceive, when it is considered that they are the same race. They had none of the merry-heartedness and vivacity which I have elsewhere pictured as a trait of our Southern negroes, and, though not decidedly morose, or fractious, they were yet exclusive, and somewhat unapproachable. They required far less whipping to coerce attention to their tasks; indeed, they worked with remarkable diligence, and it was only in case of a misunderstanding about some matter of business betwixt them and the overseer that they ever became refractory, or were brought under the lash. On the other hand, our Southern negroes rarely ever resist (though now and then they run away when frightened by overseers freshly employed), but they are generally indolent and careless if they are allowed to think that whipping will not be resorted to. I never knew a native African to run away from his master's plantation. They stand their ground doggedly, like the Roman or British soldier, regardless of consequences; and to carry out the simile, they often fight with the same determined courage, unhappily for them!

Joseph B. Cobb, Mississippi Scenes (Philadelphia: Hart, 1851), pp. 173-174.

#### Map Exercise

Fill in or identify the following on the blank map provided. Use the map in the text as your source.

1. The slave states in 1820 and 1860.
2. The distribution of slavery and cotton production in 1820 and 1860.



3.

### Interpretive Questions

Based on what you have filled in, answer the following. On some of the questions you will need to consult the narrative in your text for information or explanation.

- How did slavery relate to the growing of cotton? In what ways did slave labor serve the cotton economy, and how does this explain the relationship between the two?
- In what non-cotton-growing areas did slavery exist? What economic role did slaves play in these areas?
- Note the places where slavery did not exist. What was the economy of these areas? In what way did society in these areas differ from those areas where there was slavery?

### Summary

In the 1830s and 1840s, as the societies of the North and South developed, the two diverged, and this had an impact on the growth of the nation. During the period both sections expanded physically and economically; but while the northern economy was characterized by industrial expansion, by the growth of transportation systems (especially railroads), and by an increasingly diverse population, the southern economy continued to rest on staple-crop agriculture and slave labor. This is not to say that the South did not experience many of the same changes felt in the North, but in comparison, the slave states' way of life seemed more rooted in the past than in the future. As the economic power of the region shifted from the "upper" South to the "lower" cotton became "king," and trade and business served this master. In a short period of time a planter class spread across the South, and though planters were a minority, they influenced society and politics far beyond their numbers. During this period the "cavalier" myth was born and the "Southern lady" made her appearance. Though most Southerners could be considered "plain folk," they supported the slaveholding elites and hoped someday to be part of it. All the while slaves worked, endured, resisted, and under the most trying of conditions created a culture that remains an important part of American life.

### Review Questions

These questions are to be answered with essays. This will allow you to explore relationships between individuals, events, and attitudes of the period under review.

- According to the text, "the most important economic development in the mid-nineteenth-century South was the shift of economic power from the 'upper South' . . . to the 'lower South.' Why was this so important?  
What was "the southern way of life" for white southerners—the planter and his family, the plain folks?
- What was "the southern way of life" for black southerners—men, women, house servants, field hands, rural and urban, slave and free?
- If nothing else, slavery set the South apart, made it unique. But how did the institution function? Analyze the plantation system, its social and its economic functions. How did it control its labor? And what was the response of these workers?
- Explain the "spirited debate" that has gone on among historians over the nature of American slavery. Where does your textbook fit into this debate?

### Chapter Self Test

After you have read the chapter in the text and done the exercises in the Study Guide, take the following self test to see if you understand the material you have covered. Answers appear at the end of the Study Guide.

### MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Circle the letter of the response which best answers the question or completes the statement.

- The southern failure to create a flourishing commercial or industrial economy was in part the result of:
  - a lack of business talent in the South.
  - an unwillingness on the part of the southerners to take risks.
  - a set of values distinctive to the South that discouraged the growth of cities and industry.
  - a slave labor force that could not work successfully in industry.
- The most important economic development in the mid-nineteenth-century South was the:
  - invention of the cotton gin.
  - shift of economic power from the "upper South" to the "lower South."
  - increased agricultural diversity of the region.
  - decline in the price of slaves.
- The expansion of southern agriculture from 1820 to 1860 was due to the expansion of the cultivation of:
  - western rice.
  - tobacco in Kentucky.
  - Louisiana sugar.
  - short-staple cotton in the Black Belt.

4. The South in 1860, in contrast to 1800, had become:
- a primarily rural and agricultural region.
  - increasingly unlike the North and increasingly sensitive to criticism.
  - a region where political power rested in the hands of small farmers.
  - more urban and more industrialized.
5. A minority of southern whites owned slaves:
- and nonslaveholders dominated the political system in the region.
  - but the slaveholding planters exercised power and influence far in excess of their numbers.
  - so slavery was not very important in the lives of most whites.
  - and most whites were happy with it that way.
6. The South had a "colonial" economy in that:
- most of its land was owned by outside interests.
  - it employed slave labor.
  - it produced raw materials and purchased finished products.
  - had little political power.
7. According to the "cavalier" image, southern planters were:
- mostly horsebreeders.
  - really a rough-and-tumble group of people.
  - gentle aristocrats.
  - successful agricultural businessmen.
8. Most southern white "ladies" were:
- less subordinate to men than in the North.
  - relatively isolated from people outside their own families.
  - better educated than their northern counterparts.
  - more likely to engage in public activities or income-producing employment than their northern counterparts.
9. The typical white southerner was:
- a planter with many slaves and a lot of land.
  - a small-town merchant or professional man.
  - extremely poor.
  - a modest yeoman farmer.
10. Although most whites did not own slaves, most supported the plantation system because:
- it controlled the slaves.
  - they had economic ties to it.
  - slaveholder and nonslaveholder were often related.
  - of all of the above.
11. Which of the following was not a condition of slave life in the South?
- An adequate if rough diet.
  - Hard work, even for women and children.
  - The freedom to use the time after work as they wished to.
  - Isolation and control.
12. The slave codes of the southern states:
- imposed a uniformly harsh and dismal regime for southern slaves.
  - allowed slaves a great deal of flexibility and autonomy.
  - created a paternal and benevolent relationship between master and slave.
  - contained rigid provisions but were unevenly enforced.
13. Slaves seemed to prefer to live on larger plantations because:
- masters supervised workers personally and often worked alongside them.
  - they had more opportunities for privacy and for a social world of their own.
  - masters seemed more concerned with their health and welfare.
  - the work was lighter and provisions were more abundant.
14. By 1860, which of the following states had the highest proportion of slaveholding to nonslaveholding white families?
- Virginia.
  - Georgia.
  - South Carolina.
  - Arkansas.
15. If there was dangerous work to be done:
- masters generally hired slaves rather than use their own.
  - free labor, often Irishmen, might be hired.
  - it made no difference to masters, who used their slaves no matter what the conditions.
  - only older slaves were used.
16. As southern cities grew, the number of slaves in them declined because:
- urban slaveholders, fearing rebellion, sold their slaves.
  - diseases in cities killed them off.
  - men outnumbered women, so there was no natural increase.
  - slaves in the city ran away to the countryside.
17. The historical debate over the nature of plantation slavery demonstrates:
- the difficulty in researching a field in which few documents exist.
  - the extent to which historians are influenced by the times in which they write.
  - basic agreement that slavery was a brutal, savage institution that dehumanized all participants.
  - that black slaves in the South were generally content and happy with their lot.
18. In The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom (1976), Herbert Gutman argued that:
- slave families were better treated and lived in greater comfort than did northern industrial workers.
  - the black family survived slavery with impressive strength.
  - slavery destroyed the significance of the father in the black family.
  - slaves were unable to establish strong family ties.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN COTTON, SLAVERY, AND THE OLD SOUTH

This short chapter includes the key role that cotton played in creating the southern way of life. From there, it goes on to explain and analyze the various cultures among white and black southerners. As you move through this chapter, keep students focused on the various interpretations found in "Where Historians Disagree," which shows how our views of slavery have changed over time. The important ideas you want students to come away with are: (1) the conflicting views of slavery being a somewhat benevolent, paternalistic institution versus an overtly brutal, dehumanizing monster; (2) how blacks survived, maintaining their dignity and some aspects of their African cultures; and (3) how the institution of slavery continues to influence our attitudes towards race today.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. "Slavery was the dominating reality of all southern life." Assess the validity of this generalization for TWO of the following aspects of southern life from about 1840 to 1860: political, social, economic and intellectual life. (1984 A.P.U.S.H. free-response)  
*The next question can be used throughout Chapters Eleven through Thirteen.*
2. "Analyze the ways in which supporters of slavery in the nineteenth century used legal, religious, and economic arguments to defend the institution of slavery." (1995 A.P.U.S.H. free-response).
3. Given the fact that three-fourths of southern whites did not own slaves, why did virtually all of them support slavery as an institution?

### TERMS, CONCEPTS, NAMES

"King Cotton"	Plain folk	Gang system
"Deep South"	Hill people	"Sambo"
"factors"	"Peculiar Institution"	Gabriel Prosser
<i>De Bow's Review</i>	Slave codes	Denmark Vesey
Cavalier myth	Task system	Nat Turner
Cult of honor		

19. The only slave insurrection in the nineteenth century South was led by:
  - a. Gabriel Prosser.
  - b. Denmark Vesey.
  - c. Nat Turner.
  - d. Frederick Douglass.
20. Black adaptation to slavery:
  - a. revealed a passive contentment with bondage.
  - b. produced a rich and complex culture in support of racial pride and unity.
  - c. undermined black conversion to Christianity.
  - d. resulted in the loss of all cultural elements of African life.

### TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS

Read each statement carefully. Mark true statements "T" and false statements "F."

1. The South, like the North, changed from an agricultural to an industrial economy during the period from 1820 to 1850.
2. The South had very few professional people.
3. According to *De Bow's Review*, the South had a "colonial" relationship with the North.
4. Planters in the South were just as much competitive capitalists as the industrialists in the North.
5. Most southern planters actually were "cavaliers."
6. Most nonslaveowning whites lived far from the planters and their plantations.
7. The South in mid-nineteenth century was the only area in the western world except for Brazil and Cuba where slavery still existed.
8. Under the code of "chivalry," women were to be protected, and in return they were expected to obey men.
9. When the foreign slave trade ended, the domestic slave trade declined as well.
10. The majority of the South's white population consisted of modest farmers largely excluded from the dominant plantation society.
11. Small farmers in the South were more committed to a traditional patriarchal family structure than were the planters.
12. As a group, slaves were as healthy as whites, and the black population increased more rapidly than the white.
13. More than half of the free blacks lived in Virginia and Maryland.
14. By the 1850s the domestic slave trade was no longer important to the growth and prosperity of the South.
15. Few slave families were actually broken apart by the slave trade.
16. African American religion reflected the influence of African customs and practices.
17. The dominant response of African Americans to slavery was a combination of adaptation and resistance.
18. Because of the pressures of bondage, slave marriages seldom lasted.
19. Masters used paternalism as a means of control.
20. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, black and white women on plantations shared a common female identity born of their shared subordination to men.