

The Old South and the Coming of the Civil War



- Stereotypes about the South include magnolias and moonlight, slaves ,Simon Legree, and poor whites.

The climate and topography of the South was not truly unique. Corn, not cotton, was the most plentiful crop. Other crops besides cotton including hemp, sugar, rice, tobacco, were grown.

The slave labor system did not exclude industry and business from the old South nor did Southern values. Most southern planters were practical men who studied agriculture as a business and organized their labor force efficiently.

- Cotton did produce the cash income, but Southern agriculture was diverse.

- The overall economic performance of the antebellum south was ahead of all but a few European countries in cloth output and railroad mileage.

- The gap between the Old South and the North industrialization arose from the fact that planters put their capital into agriculture rather than manufacturing.

Social Diversity

- The layers of southern society were more complex than planters, poor whites, and black slaves.
- The typical slave holder was middle class.

- In 1860, 71 percent of slaveholders had fewer than 10 slaves.
- While yeomen farmers were more numerous and worked their farms themselves or with the help of family and occasional hired labor.

- Wealth was more concentrated in the North than in the South.
- There was a class of very poor, rural, southern whites.

The planter autocracy often occupied more influential positions beyond their formal power and far beyond that of yeoman farmers.

The South's white, non-slaveholding yeoman often resented slavery and planter leadership

Life Under Slavery

- Clichés of slavery include that slavery was a benign institution. Happy blacks singing in the fields, not feeling or acting oppressed. Or slavery as a system of organized terror that either broke the spirit of black people or drove them to rebel against their masters.
- Slave life was diverse and difficult.
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Most free blacks lived in the slums of large southern towns, worked at menial jobs, and were denied fundamental civil rights.

- In 1860, there were about four million slaves in the south and most of them worked the soil on large plantations.
- There was some advantage to working on a large plantation for slaves. There were many different jobs and skilled artisan slaves could control their working conditions to a great degree.

- Slaves living on large plantations were more physically comfortable than slaves living on smaller ones. Large plantations could provide medical services, weather tight cabins, and a varied diet.

- Even though blacks were enslaved, they developed a distinctive black American culture.
- They achieved a remarkable musical and oral literature tradition.

- Religion played a central role in black life and helped to preserve a sense of black freedom.
- Blacks found a sense of hope and freedom in their religion and in their spirituals.

Slave families were often broken up by the selling of a family member.

The law in the Old South did not recognize the sanctity of slave marriages.

Some masters did encourage slave marriages and despite the obstacles, there were a large number of stable slave families

- The 1860 census revealed that 10 percent of the slave population had partly white ancestry.
- Miscegenation-mating across racial lines- didn't often take place on well run plantations, but was less unusual in cities and towns.

The bottom line of slavery was that slaves did not control their own lives.

Slaves had no legal rights and were not allowed to develop their human potential.

Slavery reinforced racism.

- Another myth about the Old South was that it was a genteel, cultivated society. This was partially true, but after 1860, the South was also a land of fear and suspicion.
- The South feared Slave Revolts with reason. 1822, Denmark Vesey. Nat Turner's Rebellion, 1831.

In 1832 the Virginia legislature debated the possible abolition of slavery in Virginia, the last serious public discussion of slavery in the South. Southerners also hated Abolitionism

- Arguments in favor of slavery
- Slavery was sanctioned by the Bible and the Christian faith.

Virginian George Fitzhugh used a sociological argument, contending that slavery was a positive good, not a necessary evil.
Cult of chivalry.

- Southern Political Ideology
- Southern thinkers questioned majoritarian democracy.
- Southerners worried about their slow growth as compared to the North. Some blamed it on the commercial dominance of the North.
- John C. Calhoun critiqued democracy but he did not want the union destroyed. He hoped to preserve it by helping the South accommodate.

- Conclusions
- The old South was diverse society with regional, class and economic divisions.
- Despite its economic success, the Old South was not a serene and confident society.
- The Old South lived on the forced labor of millions of black slaves.
- Slave era southerners shared memories, political values and cultural attributes with other Americans, but diverged more and more from the liberal mainstream of the country.

The Coming of the Civil War

- In the 1830s and 1840s, the North began to industrialize and evolve into an open, culturally diverse society.
- The South held firm to its stake in plantation agriculture and embraced social conformity and defensiveness.

- Ideological Differences between the North and South.
- Southern political and intellectual leaders endorsed a society based on slavery, condemned dissent, rejected commercial values, endorsed inequality and resisted social change.
- The North embraced a value system of freedom, intellectual, social and political freedom, free values and attitudes.

- The economic systems of the North and South were in conflict. The tariff was a a divisive factor.
- The two most important economic issues diving the North and South were there issue of a Pacific railroad and a homestead act.
- After the Mexican War, the bonds between slave holding states grew stronger while the ones attaching them to the Union grew weaker.

- The Wilmot Proviso
- David Wilmot was a northern Democrat from Pennsylvania. In August 1846, Wilmot introduced a resolution that said none of the territory gained from the Mexican War would allow slavery.
- The Compromise of 1850
- Stephen Douglas, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster worked together on a compromise between the North and South.

- The Compromise of 1850 provided that California would enter the Union as a free state. New Mexico would be organized as two territories, New Mexico and Utah, and would decide for themselves whether they would be slave or free states. There would be a new, stricter, fugitive slave law.
- For a time, people celebrated the preserving of the Union.

- In the fall of 1859, John Brown, his sons, and a small band of black and white supporters assaulted the federal armory at Harper Ferry Virginia.
- The raid brought sectional antagonisms to a boil. The raid convinced Southerners that the North would stop at nothing to undermine slavery.
- Brown was tried for treason, convicted and sentenced to hang, but many in the North considered him a hero.

- The Kansas-Nebraska Act
- In 1854 Stephen Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Act which repealed the part of the 1820 Missouri Compromise that forbade slavery in the Louisiana Purchase north of 36°30'. It divided the territory into two parts, Kansas to the south and Nebraska to the North. He had reopened a door that Congress had once closed to slavery.

- Conclusions
- At the beginning, only a small majority of Northerners saw the war as a crusade against the social evil of slavery.
- Southerners had a deep stake in slavery and feared social and economic collapse if it collapsed.
- When the Republican Party which opposed slavery won the 1860 election with Abraham Lincoln, the South feared it would abolish slavery.

- Slavery defined the South and set it off against the North.
- Slavery made the clash of economic interests more bitter. Slavery also converted the Mexican Cession into a source of constantly escalating friction that couldn't be contained by the existing party system or other institutions that transcended section.

- The antebellum generation of Americans were not willing to compromise. Douglas could have filled the past role of Webster and Clay, but he badly miscalculated in 1854 with the Kansas Nebraska Bill and helped sever the Union.