
History 1301
U.S. to 1877

Unit 3 - Lecture 4

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Antebellum South

The Old South:

- Generalizations

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- “Lords of the loom would not be possible without lords of the lash”
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 - Social order vs relationship with means of production
 - Farmers invested in slaves instead of improvements or technology
 - Banking was more like commodity clearing houses and price speculation

- Divisions

- Upper South – AR, MO, KY, TN, VA, NC, MD, DE
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- Lower “Cotton” South – SC, GA, AL, MS, LA, TX
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- Cotton Factors

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- Few land improvements needed (drain & clear)
- Cotton Gin made production profitable from 1793
- Long tending season
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- 1860 33% of cotton grown west of Mississippi River
- 1860 75% of world cotton came from US

Southern Economic Model:

- Cotton maintained highest return on investment
 - 5% / yr till 1840, then increased
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 - \$180 per hand ave / cost of slave \$15 - \$60 a year
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 - Transportation infrastructure weak - little use
- Plantations produced an aristocracy idle rich
 - Slaves were part of 90+% of cotton production
 - Planters on social top - Paternalism, chivalry & honor in a violent society
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 - Consolidation of neighboring farms was profitable
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- 1850s brought slavery new market model success
 - Missouri Hemp farming
 - Richmond, VA industrial slavery
- Planters (large and small)
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 - 90% of slave owners had fewer than <20 Slaves
 - Self-made men in a debt-heavy business
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Southern Society & Upper South:

- Yeoman Farmers – “Plain Folk”
 - Land ownership provided independence & equality
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 - Mixed crops for local market and then some cotton for profit
 - After 1850 RR boom more market crops for cities
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 - Family, wage then slave labor based farming
- Ancillary professions and townsfolk – 8%
 - Northerners & immigrants majority of urban workers
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 - 3% of South were urban free Blacks
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- Hill, Backwoods & White Rural Proletarians
 - 20 to 30% of white population were landless labor / transient in search of work, tenet then land ownership
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 - Bedrock of slave suppression through patrols and competition with slaves for labor / opportunities
- Upper South
 - Economic slump till 1850, then free labor based farming of grain & livestock for urban markets
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 - Edmund Ruffin – scientific farming helped
 - 1850s Urbanization rose – Manufacturers / Railroads
 - - Some slavery adaptation to new economics by industrial and mining slaves
 - Self-interest slavery provided living conditions for slaves
 - Social, economic and slavery trends worried lower South

Lower South:

- Lower South Cotton & Plantations:
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 - Consumer goods imported from the few cities
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- Southern economy built on Slavery & Agriculture:
 - Little incentive for urbanization or industrialization
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 - Fear of social change to upset economic model
 - Slavery seen as fragile and change dangerous
 - Urban slaves – artisans, semi or skilled labor, musicians – lived apart from owners worked for wages – personal incentives –
 - Declined towards mid-century from 22% of urban to 10%
 - Railroads important, but not so necessary as in north
- Slavery Conditions:
 - Almost all associated with Cotton
 - Rising value of the slave investment
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 - Largest part of Southern asset base
 - Legally “Chattel” had no inherent “rights”
 - Legislated “rights” similar to today’s animals
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 - System based on violent oppression

Slave Life:

- Slavery Overview:
 - 4M slaves in 1860 5X increase since 1789 – family fertility – external importation ended in 1808
 - With 1822 State level Slave Codes Manumission becomes difficult – all conduct regulated
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 - - Dangerous jobs often hired out to local hired whites
 - American Slave life:
 - Creole Dialect / music / religion –American culture blend with Caribbean & African roots
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 - 1850s predominantly at least surface Christians - White sponsored & “Invisible Church”
 - Children “of the plantation” yet naming by slaves
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- Slave Families - key to existence / resistance
 - Different model than traditional white family
 - White view Black family did not exist - only imitation
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 - Few had surnames or defined parentage till 1850s
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 - Many “abroad” marriages – neighborhood based
 - Provided enhanced control, but wider horizons
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 - Communal buildings (2 rooms and loft)
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Slave Life II:

- Mutual Self interest & profit ruled behavior
 - Slaves had half the life expectancy of whites
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 - 66% of families had both “parents” present
- Labor system varied – “neighborhood” pattern
 - Field / House / Skilled & Specialty (elites)
 - Gang System / Project system
 - Increasing evolution of work methods in 1850s
 - Use of clocks / whistles led to productivity gains
 - Increasingly documented “Liberties” for productivity
- Slave Resistance
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 - Denmark Vesey’s Conspiracy – 1822
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 - Harriet Tubman 1849 Underground Railroad –free 1,000 per year (fear & propaganda)
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 - Runaways – usually only temporary
 - 2K or .05% a year
 - Rumored sales or heavy work season
 - Semi-mythical Maroon Societies

Conclusions:

- 1830s turning point
 - 1832 Va narrowly defeats abolition (where to go?)
 - Nat Turner & Abolitionists created state of siege
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 - John C Calhoun – Slavery speech of 1837 – basis of a free society
- Pro-
 - Paternalistic compared to Northern Wage labor
 - Freed whites of dehumanizing labor & allowed white liberty
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 - Christianizing “white man’s burden”
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 - Ordained by God in the Bible / obeying secular laws
 - 66% of exports result of slave labor
 - What will they do after abolition argument?
- Divisions of society over slavery
 - 1837 Presbyterians / 1844 Methodist & Episcopal Church / 1845 Baptists
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- Northerners had few counter-arguments
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 - Slavery provided unfair economic advantages to the rich
 - Humanity of individuals in Revolution, Cities and personal acquaintance