CHAPTER 11

MASTERS AND SLAVES

SUMMARY
In the South in the first half of the nineteenth century, an elite group of Whites dominated the society and made profits on the labor of Black slaves, who nonetheless were able to develop a rich culture of their own.

The Divided Society of the Old South
Slavery’s existence in the old South rested upon inequality. Socially, people living within the realm of a slave-based economy were granted status according to class and caste. Within this system, a diverse spectrum existed between planters and field hands.

The World of Southern Blacks
Slaves, struggling against tremendous odds, managed to create a full, rich culture. Moreover, slaves created a community that made psychic survival possible.

Slaves’ Daily Life and Labor
Ninety percent of the South’s four million slaves worked on plantations, with the rest working in industry or in cities. Slaves working on plantations typically worked in a “gang” system, overseen by a driver. Some slaves who worked on rice plantations worked under a “task” system that gave slaves more control over their work pace. Within both of these systems, about three-quarters of the slaves worked as field hands. The remaining slaves carried out a wide range of duties from cooking, to cleaning, to building and gardening.

Slave Families, Kinship, and Community
The slave family was the most important institution for African Americans. Families, though oftentimes broken up, provided a foundation that prevented slaves from becoming completely demoralized. Most importantly, families provided slaves with a sense of community, not simply victimized individuals of oppression.

African-American Religion

Resistance and Rebellion
On a daily basis African-American slaves resisted their oppressive plight through sabotage, stealing provisions, story-telling, and running away. Slaves also rebelled violently. Between 1800 and 1831, slaves participated in revolts, hoping to liberate themselves.
Free Blacks in the Old South
Though certainly a minority, a few blacks did attempt to live freely with the Old South. By the 1830s, this unique group became increasingly subjected to rigid rules designed to limit their movement and contact with other African Americans.

White Society in the Antebellum South
Popular perceptions of the Antebellum South that portray the era with aristocratic splendor fall short of the reality for an overwhelming majority of White Southerners. Only about 1 percent of White Southerners could afford to own fifty slaves, entertain lavishly, and live in a mansion. Most White Southerners were nonslaveholding yeoman farmers. Nonetheless, their whiteness granted them economic, political, and social advantages.

The Planters’ World
Planters, by definition those owning more than fifty slaves, established the social, political, and economic tone in the Old South. A majority of great planters of the pre-Civil War era were self-made rather than descendents of the old colonial gentry. Few planter households lived up to Old South images.

Planters and Paternalism
Planters owned more half of all slaves. Within this class emerged the ideology of paternalism. Planters believed that slaves were an extended part of their family that they cared for and protected. Planters also thought this was necessary because Blacks were a race of perpetual children needing care. Other historians portray planters simply as brutal capitalists, only concerned with profit. Both theories reveal a highly complex system that had to maintain itself through force, and also had to make a profit through maintaining healthy slaves. Nonetheless, testimony and evidence indicates that masters generally did not have close familiar relationships with most of their slaves.

Small Slaveholders
Eighty-eight percent of all slaveholders owned fewer that twenty slaves. Most of these possessed fewer than ten. These households necessitated more intimate contact, though not necessarily better treatment. Scant evidence exists from these households.

Yeoman Farmers
Below the small slaveholders, mostly concentrated in the backcountry, lived the yeoman farmers who owned land they worked themselves. These folk were self-reliant with limited avenues to the national and global economies. Yeoman women played a vital role in maintaining household economies.

A Closed Mind and a Closed Society
By the 1830s, public debate over the maintenance of slavery in the South became anathema. Prior to this time, many prominent White Southerners declared the institution a “necessary evil.” Fear of slavery uprising coupled with yeoman farmers heeding the
call of abolitionists to end the evil institution led to the argument that slavery was a “positive good.” This ideology dominated southern politics after the 1830s, and was enforced through violence and censorship.

**Slavery and the Southern Economy**
Southern society rested economically upon the institution of slavery. Between 1810 and 1860, the number of slaves owned tripled, increasing the number to nearly 4 million.

**The Internal Slave Trade**
As tobacco farming became less important in some “upper” southern states like Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky, which raised other crops and began infant industries, these states began selling “surplus” slaves to the lower South. Slavery emerged to dominate the lower South, more than the upper South.

**The Rise of the Cotton Kingdom**
The invention of the cotton gin and the introduction of "short-staple" cotton to the lower South made cotton the single most important export and the most profitable business in the United States. The amount of cotton that was grown in the Deep South grew dramatically between 1817 and 1860.

**Slavery and Industrialization**
Although many Southerners considered methods to diversify and industrialize their region, most investment dollars went into cotton. The dependence on slavery and cotton impeded industrialization in the South.

**The “Profitability” Issue**
The cotton/slavery system profited the planter directly, but it probably limited the South's development.

**Conclusion: Worlds in Conflict**
The Old South was deeply divided by class, race, culture, and geography. The region, nonetheless, was unified by a booming plantation economy. This fractured society soon manifested itself in the Civil War.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**
After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. Offer an overview of the complicated and diverse institution of slavery.

2. Analyze the effects of short-staple cotton and the cotton gin on the South.

3. Explain the arguments and issues surrounding the profitability and efficiency of slavery.
4. Discuss the relevant statistics about slave ownership in the South.

5. Describe the daily lives of a typical planter, a small slave holder, a yeoman farmer, and a mountaineer.

6. List the arguments for and against slavery offered by southerners.

7. Explain the various methods used by slaves to resist the oppression of their masters.

8. Discuss the role of the slave family.

9. Explain the importance and development of slave religion.

10. Describe the life of free Blacks in the Old South.

GLOSSARY

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

1. **oppressor** one who burdens another with unjust, unreasonable, or cruel hardships
   “... divine wrath was about to be visited upon the White oppressor.”

2. **abolitionism** the principle favoring an immediate end to slavery. "... 1831 also saw the emergence of a more militant northern abolitionism."

3. **sectionalism** the principle that politics should be based on arcs or districts with certain common geographic features. "... the growth of a more militant sectionalism... inspired threats to secede..."

4. **staple** a crop grown regularly for marketing at a profit. "... landowners who sought to profit from expanding market opportunities by raising staple crops on a large scale."

5. **caste** a distinct hereditary class. "... caste-inherited advantages or disadvantages associated with racial ancestry.”

6. **paternalistic** pertaining to treatment of one by another in a fatherly fashion. 
   "... liked to think of themselves as kindly and paternalistic."

7. **patriarchal** of or belonging to the father or father-like ruler of a group. “Often they referred to their slaves as if they were members of an extended patriarchal family.”

8. **Spartan** unadorned by luxuries. "... life was relatively Spartan.”

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9. **deportation** exile, banishment, or removal of an undesirable from a country. "... program of gradual, voluntary emancipation accompanied deportation of the freedmen."

10. **regime** a political system; a manner of management, government, or control. "... they needed some kind of ... special regime equivalent to the asylums ...

11. **socialism** a type of economic organization with central planning and some government ownership. "Worker insecurity ... led inevitably to strikes, bitter class conflicts, and the rise of socialism ...

12. **armories** a place where weapons are kept. "... conspiracy ... to seize local armories ...

13. **Jacobins** violent revolutionaries. “... the Blacks were the Jacobins of the country.”

14. **allegory** a narration with personification, symbolism, and an extended or continued metaphor.

**IDENTIFICATION**

Briefly identify the meaning and significance of the following terms.

1. Nat Turner

2. Short-Staple Cotton

3. Cotton Gin

4. Hinton R. Helper

5. American Colonization Society
6. George Fitzhugh  

7. Cassius M. Clay  

8. Yeoman Farmer  

9. David Walker  

10. Harriet Tubman  

MATCHING

A. Match the following people with the appropriate description.

_____ 1. Hinton R. Helper  
   a. wrote a novel about a brutal slave owner named Simon Legree

_____ 2. George Fitzhugh  
   b. believed that White southerners were victims of slavery and should fight against it

_____ 3. Cassius M. Clay  
   c. was a brave abolitionist from Kentucky

_____ 4. Frederick Douglass  
   d. defended slavery by attacking the wage labor system

_____ 5. Harriet Beecher Stowe  
   e. was probably the richest planter of the 1850s
   f. was an escaped slave who founded the newspaper North Star
B. Match the following people with the appropriate description.

1. Denmark Vesey
   a. went into the South to help runaway slaves

2. David Walker
   b. mobilized a large number of slaves in an unsuccessful rebellion in Richmond, Virginia

3. Harriet Tubman
   c. was an escaped slave who became an orator for an antislavery organization

4. Reverend Richard
   d. wrote a pamphlet denouncing slavery and calling for a revolt

5. Gabriel Prosser
   e. organized the African Methodist Episcopal church
   f. led an unsuccessful slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina

COMPLETION

Answer the question or complete the statement by filling in the blanks with the correct word or words.

1. The leader of a violent slave rebellion in Virginia on August 22, 1831, was ____________.

2. The original plantation crop of the upper South in colonial days was ____________.

3. The most important domestic economic interest and the most valuable single export for the United States on the eve of the Civil War was ____________.

4. Some southerners were fans of the romantic cult of chivalry as described in the novels of ________________.

5. The ________________ favored gradual emancipation and deportation of Blacks.

6. Lack of ________________ was primarily responsible for the low standard of living of southern Whites.

7. Proslavery advocates argued that the institution was sanctioned by the authority of the ________________.
8. Many African-American fugitives fought along with the Indians in ____________.

9. A network to assist escaped slaves in finding their way to freedom was called the ____________.

10. ____________ was an ex-slave who made dangerous raids into the South to help runaway slaves.

TRUE/FALSE

Mark the following statements either T (True) or F (False).

___  1. From colonial days until the Civil War, growing cotton was the most important enterprise in Tidewater Virginia and Maryland.

___  2. Although cotton was highly profitable, its profits were not widely distributed among southerners.

___  3. The diversified economy of the South made slavery unprofitable.

___  4. Aside from the existence of slavery, the South was not a stratified society.

___  5. A substantial majority of southern Whites owned slaves.

___  6. Most great planters were self-made men of wealth.

___  7. Most southern yeomen disliked both abolitionists and wealthy planters.

___  8. Black churches were simply copies of White Protestant churches.

___  9. The African-American family was an extremely important and strong institution for slaves.

___ 10. Free Blacks were treated as essentially equal to Whites.
MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. By the 1850s the economy of the Deep South was
   a. based on a variety of agricultural crops mixed with light industry.
   b. growing because of the phenomenon of a long period of steady cotton prices.
   c. dependent upon the sale and export of short-staple cotton.
   d. declining because of the constant panics and bank failures of the 1840s.

2. The profits from cotton were mostly used to
   a. diversify southern agriculture.
   b. industrialize southern cities.
   c. phase out slavery slowly.
   d. support plantations and buy more slaves and land.

3. In the Chesapeake or tidewater areas of Virginia and Maryland, farmers
   a. shifted from tobacco to wheat after the Revolution.
   b. continued growing tobacco, but with fewer slaves.
   c. grew large amounts of both tobacco and cotton until the Civil War.
   d. actually grew more cotton than did farmers in the Deep South.

4. Most southern Whites
   a. owned between one and five slaves.
   b. were simple yeoman farmers.
   c. actually opposed the institution of slavery.
   d. were poor mountain folk surviving on the sale of corn whiskey.

5. In their day-to-day activities, most large plantation owners
   a. had much leisure time.
   b. were shrewd, hardworking businesspeople.
   c. spent their time drinking, gambling, and dueling.
   d. spent their cotton profits investing in diverse enterprises.

6. The influential planters of the South
   a. added to their profits by selling the offspring of their slaves.
   b. often sold slaves and land to increase their net worth.
   c. found it in their own self-interest to give their slaves at least a minimum level of sustinence so that they would be fit enough to work.
   d. were never close or friendly with a slave.
7. The substantial class of southern White yeoman farmers was
   a. composed of degraded, shiftless, "poor white" squatters.
   b. concentrated in the rich, alluvial river bottoms of the South.
   c. composed of Jacksonians who wanted to abolish slavery.
   d. composed of those who opposed both northern abolitionists and southern aristocrats.

8. Most Southerners believed that
   a. slavery was essentially evil but necessary.
   b. slavery provided benefits to all involved, including the slaves.
   c. emancipation was inevitable.
   d. the slaves should live as close to the patterns of their African tribal life as possible.

9. Free Blacks in the North and the South
   a. generally opposed slavery.
   b. were essentially equal to Whites.
   c. had political rights but struggled against economic deprivation.
   d. had no sympathy for slaves.

10. Free Blacks in the North and White abolitionists
    a. agreed on goals and methods.
    b. conflicted over leadership in antislave organizations.
    c. often intermarried.
    d. agreed on a colonization and deportation program.

11. Violent slave revolts were
    a. uncommon throughout the South.
    b. common before 1831.
    c. common after 1831.
    d. uncommon in the upper South but frequent in the Deep South.

12. Which of the following does not explain why non-slave holding Whites supported slavery?
    a. They felt that slavery kept African Americans “in their place.”
    b. They had respect and deference for the planters.
    c. They aspired to be planters and own slaves.
    d. They feared and disliked African Americans.

13. Regarding the debate over slavery, the southern White elite
    a. suppressed most opposition arguments with law, violence, and social pressure.
    b. confidently encouraged the debate.
    c. suppressed only obviously harmful, potentially dangerous arguments.
    d. did not resort to religious arguments to defend slavery.
14. The underground railroad aided
   a. escaped slaves and was a largely privately owned enterprise.
   b. escaped slaves and was a largely White-owned enterprise.
   c. Whites in recovering runaway slaves.
   d. commuters in large urban communities.

15. The African-American family during slavery was
   a. loosely organized and resulted in much promiscuity.
   b. monogamous and stable.
   c. opposed to premarital sex.
   d. stable but polygamous.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

To check your understanding of the key issues of this period, consider the following problems.

1. To what extent was it true that northern laborers were in as bad a condition as southern slaves?

2. Why were the yeoman farmers not opposed to slavery, but instead vigorously in support of it?

3. Was the South justified in suppressing free speech on the issue of slavery?

4. How democratic was the pre-war South?

5. Compare the reaction of slaves to oppression with examples of passive resistance.

6. In what ways was the African-American family experience more loving and affectionate than that of its White counterpart’s?
CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

Using the material in Chapter 13 of the text and the primary sources provided below, please answer the questions that follow the reading selections.

Frederick Douglass, “Whipping slaves”
Peter Randolph, “Culture and Religion in the Quarters”

Frederick Douglass, Whipping Slaves

It would astonish one, unaccustomed to a slaveholding life, to see with what wonderful ease a slaveholder can find things of which to make occasion to whip a slave. A mere look, word, or motion—a mistake, accident, or want of power—are all matters for which a slave may be whipped at any time. Does a slave look dissatisfied? It is said, he has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting high-minded, and should be taken down a button-hole lower. Does he forget to pull off his hat at the approach of a white person? Then he is wanting in reverence, and should be whipped for it. Does he ever venture to suggest a different mode of doing things from that pointed out by his master? He is indeed presumptuous, and getting above himself; and nothing less than a flogging will do for him. Does he, while plowing, break a plough—or, while hoeing, break a hoe? It is owing to his carelessness, and for it a slave must always be whipped.

Peter Randolph, Culture and Religion in the Quarters

Many say the Negroes receive religious education—that Sabbath worship is instituted for them as for others, and were it not for slavery, they would die in their sins—that really, the institution of slavery is a benevolent missionary enterprise. Yes, they are preached to, and I will give my readers some faint glimpses of these preachers, and their doctrines and practices. . . . The prominent preaching to the slave is, ‘Servants, obey your masters.’ Do not steal or lie, for this is very wrong. Such conduct is sinning against the Holy Ghost, and is base ingratitude to your kind masters, who feed, clothe, and protect you.” All Gospel, my readers! It is great policy to build a church for the “dear slave,” and allow him the wondrous privilege of such holy instruction! . . .

On the Sabbath, after doing their morning work, and breakfast over (such as it was), that portion of the slaves who belong to the church ask of the overseer permission to attend meeting. If he is in the mood to grant their request, he writes them a pass, as follows: “Permit the bearer to pass and repass to . . . this evening, unmolested.” Should a pass not be granted, the slave lies down, and sleeps for the day—the only way to drown his sorrow and disappointment.

Others of the slaves, who do not belong to the church, spend their Sabbath in playing with marbles, and other games, for each other’s food, etc. Some occupy the time in dancing to the music of the banjo, made out of a large gourd. This is continued till the after part of the day, when they separate, and gather wood for their log-cabin fires for the ensuing week.

Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking from the trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot. Arrangements are then made for conducting the exercises. They first ask each other how they feel, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then select a certain space, in separate groups, for their division of the meeting. Preaching in order, by the brethren; then praying and singing all round, until they generally feel quite happy. The speaker usually commences by calling himself unworthy, and talks very slowly, until, feeling the spirit, he grows excited, and in a short time, there fall to the ground twenty or thirty men and women under its influence. Enlightened people call it excitement; but I wish the same was felt by everybody, so far as they are sincere.

The slave forgets all his sufferings, except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming: “Thank God, I shall not live here always!” Then they pass from one to another, shaking hands, and bidding each other farewell, promising, should they meet no more on earth, to strive and meet in heaven, where all is joy, happiness, and liberty. As they separate, they sing a parting hymn of praise.

Sometimes the slaves meet in an old log-cabin, when they find it necessary to keep a watch. If discovered, they escape, if possible; but those who are caught often get whipped. Some are willing to be punished thus for Jesus’ sake. Most of the songs used in worship are composed by the slaves themselves, and describe their own suffering
1. Explain the reasons for the whipping of slaves as described by Douglass. What were the psychological effects of the beatings on the slave and on those observing?

2. According to your text, what role did religion play in “buffering” slaves against the cruelty of whipping?

3. According to your text, what role did the family play in protecting slaves against the effects of whipping?

4. According to Peter Randolph, how did slaves forge an “invisible institution” to help them endure slavery?

5. Are the views of your text and Randolph consistent in their description of the role played by religion in helping slaves face their hostile environment?