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Slavery and the Old South

(1) CHAPTER OUTLINE

Frederick Douglass learns from his masters about complex, intricate chains that bind slaves and masters to each other. He also learns that education is the way to freedom.

Building the Cotton Kingdom
- The Expansion of Slavery in a Global Economy
- Slavery in Latin America
- White and Black Migrations in the South
- Southern Dependence on Slavery
- Paternalism and Honor in the Planter Class
- Slavery, Class, and Yeoman Farmers
- The Nonslaveholding South

Morning: Master and Mistress in the Big House
- The Burdens of Slaveholding
- The Plantation Mistress
- Justifying Slavery

Noon: Slaves in House and Fields
- Daily Toil
- Slave Health and Punishments
- Slave Law and the Family

Night: Slaves in Their Quarters
- Black Christianity
- The Power of Song
- The Enduring Family

Resistance and Freedom
- Forms of Black Protest
- Slave Revolts
- Free Blacks: Becoming One's Own Master

Conclusion: Douglass's Dream of Freedom

(2) SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS
1. The tremendous growth of agriculture in the Old South was dependent on cotton and slavery. But contrary to myth, the South was an area of great diversity, regionally, socially, and in terms of class and slave ownership. These differences bred tensions among whites as well as between masters and slaves.

2. Although slavery was a labor system, the chapter emphasizes the daily life and complex, entangled relationships of white masters and black slaves and points out the difficulties of generalizing about their relationships. The experiences of the family of rice planter Robert Allston suggests some of the dimensions of white slaveholders’ lives, while the youth of Frederick Douglass illuminates the lives of black slaves.

3. A unique structure in this chapter discusses slavery in three sections: morning in the Big House, which focuses on white masters; noon in the fields, which looks at daily work and other hardships of the slaves; and nighttime in the quarters, which describes a slave culture and community centered around religion, music, the family, and other adaptive survivals from African culture.

4. Racism was not confined to the South but existed throughout American society. Racism as well as slavery limited black freedom. To a much lesser extent, southern slaveholders also suffered limitations on their freedom from the burdens of the slave system.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

Familiarity with Basic Knowledge

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Distinguish several geographic regions and the main crops; then describe the socioeconomic class variations of slaveholding patterns in the Old South.

2. Explain the distribution of slaveholders and nonslaveholders in the South.

3. Describe the burdens of slavery from the perspective of the slaveholders and explain five ways in which they justified slavery.

4. Describe a typical day on the plantation for slave men and women, both in the house and in the fields.

5. Explain the nature of black family life and culture in the slave quarters, including how religion, music, and folklore gave the slaves a sense of identity and self-esteem.

6. List five ways in which the slaves protested and resisted their situation.
Practice in Historical Thinking Skills

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Develop arguments for and against slavery from the perspective of southern slaveholders, nonslaveholding southerners, northern whites, slaves, and freed blacks.

2. Discuss and evaluate the question of who was “free” in southern antebellum society.

3. Identify the author's interpretation of slavery and other possible interpretations.

(4) IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW

1787 Constitution adopted with proslavery provisions
1793 Eli Whitney invents cotton gin
1794-1800 The Haitian Revolution
1800 Gabriel Prosser conspiracy in Virginia
1808 External slave trade prohibited by Congress
1820 South becomes world's largest cotton producer
1822 Denmark Vesey's conspiracy in Charleston, South Carolina
1827 John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish publish the first African American newspaper *Freedom’s Journal*
1829 David Walker’s *Appeal*
1830s Southern justification of slavery changes from a necessary evil to a positive good
1831 Nat Turner's slave revolt in Virginia
1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* published
1850s Cotton boom
1851 Indiana state constitution excludes free blacks
1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes best-selling *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
1860 Cotton production and prices peak

Other Names to Know
(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

**manumission**: The freeing of slaves by individual owners

**culture**: The values and way of life of a group of people that gives the group a unifying identity

**polygenesis**: The belief that blacks were a separately created race and hence inherently inferior

**Herrenvolk democracy**: The theory in the antebellum South that although there were economic inequalities among whites, all whites still shared an equality in their superiority to all blacks, a theory that enabled the southern planter elite to minimize class antagonisms among whites

(6) ENRICHMENT IDEAS


2. Listen to some slave spirituals and work songs and analyze them. What do they reveal about the slave experience and about attitudes toward religion? Notice the double meanings.

3. Are there any historical sites in your area related to slavery—for example, plantations, stations on the underground railroad, or slave markets? Do restored plantations give a balanced view of life on the old plantation, the slave quarters as well as the Big House?

4. Consider the heritage of slavery in modern society. To what extent does it still affect our lives and how?

5. Are blacks and whites more or less “free” today than they were during slavery? Are they more or less entangled with each other?
Multiple choice: Choose the best answer.

1. Most southern families had
   a. fewer than ten slaves
   b. over ten slaves
   c. no slaves
   d. fewer than five slaves

2. By the 1850s, the largest number of slaves were found in
   a. Texas and Louisiana
   b. the Upper South of Virginia and Kentucky
   c. cities
   d. the black belt stretching from South Carolina across Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi

3. What percentage of southern white families were slaveholders?
   a. 25 percent
   b. 50 percent
   c. 75 percent
   d. 90 percent

4. The most valuable export crop in the South was
   a. cotton
   b. corn
   c. rice
   d. tobacco

5. The southern economic endeavors with the greatest economic value were
   a. rice and hemp
   b. corn and hogs
   c. cotton and sugarcane
   d. shipbuilding and textiles

6. The typical southern slaveholding family had
   a. fewer than 10 slaves
   b. between 10 and 20 slaves
   c. about 20 slaves
   d. over 50 slaves

7. According to the text, the worst feature of slavery was
   a. the denial of freedom
   b. whippings
   c. the breakup of families
   d. vitamin deficiency and illness

8. The sociological justification of slavery based its argument primarily on
9. After Nat Turner’s revolt in 1831, slaves were
   a. more easily given their freedom but treated more harshly
   b. treated less harshly but denied their freedom
   c. feared less than before
   d. given the right to vote

10. Which of the following statements is not true about slave women?
    a. they had networks for mutual support
    b. they were encouraged to have many children
    c. they had no choice in their marriage partners
    d. they sometimes resisted forcible sexual encounters by whites

11. African forms of religious expression
    a. gradually died out in the New World
    b. were too sinful to survive in civilized society
    c. survived in adapted form in the New World
    d. survived in the West Indies but not in the United States

12. The slave family
    a. was destroyed by the slave trade
    b. played a key role in achieving black self-esteem
    c. imitated the family patterns of whites
    d. transmitted black family patterns to whites

13. By the 1850s, the largest number of free blacks were in
    a. the North
    b. the Upper South
    c. the Lower South
    d. Canada

14. We know about the cultural life of slaves in the quarters at night because of
    a. overseers' reports
    b. slave narratives
    c. congressional investigating committees
    d. the diaries of northern visitors

15. Slave culture was expressed most clearly in
    a. songs sung in the fields during the day
    b. Robert Allston's prayer house
    c. religious meetings at night
    d. the incidence of runaways
16. According to the text, a key element for the urban free blacks was
   a. African-American owned business
   b. the likelihood of finding high-paying jobs
   c. African-American churches
   d. the ability to help in numerous slave escapes

Identify and show a relationship between each of the following pairs:

- James Hammond and Newton Knight
- Frederick Douglass and Sophia Auld
- yeoman farmers and poor whites
- visible and invisible black religious institutions
- day-to-day resistance and Nat Turner's revolt

Essays

1. Describe four class levels of southern white society, and show how each might have defended or justified slavery as necessary or good for its self-interest. Which would have defended slavery most vigorously, and why do you think so?

2. Compare and contrast some of the typical events in the daily life of a house slave and a field slave. Which would you have preferred to be and why?

3. Compare and contrast features of slavery in Latin America with slavery in the United States.

4. Compare and contrast the attitudes of white southerners and white northerners toward blacks. How do you explain whatever differences seem to exist?

5. Describe four or five manifestations of slave culture. Be as specific as you can about sources and modes of expression. Which do you think best expressed authentic slave culture and why?

6. Present an interpretation of slavery from the point of view of three different historians. One sees slavery from the perspective of southern slaveholders, one from the viewpoint of northern white abolitionists, and one from the perspective of the slaves themselves. What would be the major differences?

7. Explain the living conditions and economic circumstances that prevailed for nonslave-holding southern farm families.