

CHAPTER 11

COTTON, SLAVERY, AND THE OLD SOUTH

Chapter Summary

The North and South differed in many ways, but none proved more significant than the South's staple crop economy and the labor force that worked it. Cotton (and in some areas tobacco, rice, and sugar) created a system of business and commerce that made Dixie different from the rest of the nation, and the most obvious difference was the region's reliance on slavery. More than an economic system, slavery was a critical, creative force in a social order that included planters, their ladies, plain folk (men and women), and, of course, the slaves themselves. The result was a complex society that has often been romanticized and frequently misunderstood. Bound together by race and by a firm belief in a patriarchal, hierarchical system, whites of different classes and genders shared many of the same beliefs and wanted many of the same things. At the same time, there were significant differences among members of the white community, differences which were not always apparent to the casual observer. African Americans, also united by race and in most cases by slavery, found a variety of ways to maintain their dignity and, in so doing, managed to create an enduring cultural system that transcended their condition and enabled them to endure the hardships they faced.

Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 11 should enable the student to understand

1. The staple crop economic system and how it shaped commercial life in the Old South.
2. The Old South's "colonial dependency" and why it did little to change it.
3. The role of the planter in the southern social and economic system.
4. The role of the "Southern Lady" in the Old South.
5. Who the "plain folks" were and their significance in the southern social order.
6. The role of an enslaved people in the Southern social and economic system.
7. The various ways in which slaves resisted slavery.
8. The ways African Americans developed their own separate culture and how it helped sustain them under slavery.
9. The continuing historical debate over the South, its "peculiar institution," and the effects of enslavement on African Americans.

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 in both myth and reality.
3. The nature of the South's "peculiar institution" and the effect it had on the southern way of life for both whites and blacks.

Chapter 11

Assignment 1

Sources:

Textbook: pg. 293 to mid-pg. 303.

Questions:

1. What was "the most important economic development in the South of the mid-19c?" What caused this, and what was its economic impact?
2. What were the agricultural region in the South? What crops were grown in them?
3. How did cotton become "king" in the South? 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 and why?
5. What is meant by the statement that the Antebellum South had a "colonial" economy?
6. What was the "Cavalier" image? 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 differences between southern and northern women? Why did so few southern white women rebel against their social/economic roles?
11. If the typical white southerner was not a great planter, what was he? What was life like for southern "plain folk" or yeomen?
12. Why did so few non-slaveholding whites oppose the slaveholding oligarchy? Where did these opponents live?
13. How have historical interpretations of the impact of slavery on the slaves evolved over the years? What factors shaped these historians' assessments?

Terms

1. "King Cotton"
2. Antebellum South
3. DeBow's Review
4. "Cavalier" image
5. "slavocracy"
6. Greek Revival-style
7. Preston Brooks
8. "Southern Belle"
9. yeoman
10. Southern paternalism
11. Mississippi Married Women's Property Act of 1839

Chapter 11 Assignment 2

Sources:

Textbook: mid-pg. 303 - pg. 313.

Questions:

1. What were slave codes? What function did they serve? How were they applied?
2. How was slave life shaped by the slave's relationship with his or her owner?
3. Explain the debate over the actual material condition of slavery.
4. 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?
5. How extensive was the practice of manumission in the South?
6. What was the status of the freed slave in the South? How did this compare with the status of freed people in the North?
7. Explain the characteristics of the foreign and domestic slave trade. On what grounds was this trade criticized? How did the South answer this criticism?
8. 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?
9. What were the most widely recognized slave revolts? What did they accomplish?
10. How did the process of adaptation help slaves develop their own separate culture? How was this a form of resistance as well?
11. How did music both shape and reflect the lives of African Americans on slave plantations?
12. What role did religion play in the life of slaves? What role did the slave family play?

Terms:

1. "Peculiar Institution"
2. George Fitzhugh
3. "Sambo" image
4. William Harper
5. manumission
6. Gabriel Prosser
7. Denmark Vesey
8. Nat Turner
9. African Methodist Episcopal Church
10. Hinton Rowan Helper
11. The Impending Crisis