

Antebellum South

- I. South is a slave society. Slavery invades everything, determines everything.
- II. Basically, in the south, the economy is *much* less diverse than we'd expect—19th century time of tremendous economic changes, and they're really *not* taking place in the south.
- II. Cities
 - A. Very few cities in the south—Why?
 1. Basically, not necessary: Southern economy *has* a reliable backbone already.
 2. But by the 1800s, you start to get a few cities—two in particular: New Orleans and Charleston.
 - B. Both Charleston and New Orleans very similar in some ways:
 1. Large black populations
 2. Both very wrapped up in slavery.
 3. But also some important differences: Charleston is a port city, to some extent, but it's also a leisure center—the big event in Charleston isn't the port, but the racetrack, where slaveowners from all over the Carolinas are going to come to see the races every year.
 4. New Orleans much more clearly a port city—only one big export: slaves themselves. Lots and lots of slaves are going to go through New Orleans.
 5. Also, *tiny* compared to northern cities—Charleston has something like 25,000 by 1830, compared to New York's 300,000 or so residents. Even New Orleans, by far the largest city in the south, had only 90,000.
- IV. Industry
 - A. If in the North, industrialization—minor though it is—is a big story, in the south it is almost the opposite.
 - B. *Very* little industrial development, especially early 19th century.
 - C. By 1840s, you start to get more factories, especially in Atlanta; just like in the north, it's all about the cotton mills.

- D. There is actually a little boom in cotton mill investment, but quickly fades: by 1850 or so all the cotton mills are going broke, because investors can make more money elsewhere: slaves themselves.
 - E. Also some other examples: a few scattered mines, as well as factories to make cotton gins. But again, few and far between. If industry in the north is very scattered and uneven, in the south it just isn't a factor.
- V. Slavery, in short, determines everything—even places like factories and cities are shaped, completely, by slavery.
- VI. Slavery also shapes relationships among different groups of whites, sometimes in very important ways.
- A. Slave owners
 - 1. First, view themselves as very much an elite class, with all the rights and responsibilities that such a class has.
 - 2. Second, because of that, lots of *noblesse oblige*: cotton planters view everyone in the neighborhood, small farmers, non-landowning whites, and slaves, in the same way: their responsibility.
 - 3. In exchange for respect and deference, large planters provide all sorts of things. Defined as *paternalism*.
 - 4. For slaves, “guidance.” Basically beatings and all sorts of other horrors.
 - 5. But to hear them talk about it, this is the best thing for a slave.
 - 6. Result: Slaves *must be happy* under slavery.
Dr. Samuel Cartwright: Louisiana physician: He diagnosed their malady as *drapetomania*, literally the flight-from-home-madness, ‘as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation.’ Another ailment peculiar to Black people was *dysaesthesia Aethiopica*, sometimes called rascality by overseers, but actually due to ‘insensibility of nerves’ and ‘hebetude of mind’, explained Dr. Cartwright. Whereas psychologically normal Negroes were faithful and happy –go-lucky, the mentally afflicted ones ‘pay no attention to the rights of property...slight their work...raise disturbances with their overseers.’ ”
 - 7. Also, a real shift in racism under cotton planters: certainly plenty of racial ideologies, but they’re not going to explain slavery biologically. To them, slavery is defensible as a positive good because the owners are taking care of the slave.

8. Important note: this is *not* segregation. Whites and blacks are in constant contact.
9. Some of it is *extremely* brutal. Lots of rape: Mary Chesnut, wealthy southern woman who's generally opposed to slavery: "God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an iniquity! Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds."
10. But paternalist slaveowners don't just run their plantations—they run the entire society: as a result, the antebellum south is a slave society, even though very few whites own slaves.

B. Yeoman farmers

1. Under Jefferson, these had been the ideal.
2. Under slavery, in some ways, are allowed to flourish.
3. Rent slaves out from large slave owners rather than free workers, at a much cheaper rate.
4. Slave-owners are going to be more or less protecting them throughout the early 1800s. As other farmers (Esp. in the north) are forced into debt), yeoman farmers in the south are always able to borrow money at low interest from great planters in their area.
5. Also come to agreements about fencing: in northeast by this time, fencing fairly common, to guard your land. In south, however, large planters *never* fence their lands, allowing the yeoman farmers' animals to wander all over the place.
6. And slaveowners are buying *a lot* of the yeoman farmers' crops at inflated prices.
7. In short, Southern yeoman farmers are *immune* from the market, protected from the market.
8. For all these reasons, they're going to be supporting large slaveowners.
9. Also another theory on this subject: Stephanie McCurry: *Masters of Small Worlds*. Paternalism binds them all together.

10. Despite all that, at least some resent slaveowners, largely for their political power.
 10. Especially true in mountainous regions: Western part of Virginia, for instance, where there really aren't any slaves.
- C. Somewhat harder to understand, both for us and for folk at the time:
Landless whites
1. Do not exist in the Southern imagination: slavery is supposed to replace poverty.
 2. One third of all whites are landless—probably the least studied group in the American south.
 3. Largely involved in sharecropping—basically a constant cycle of debt to the owner.
 4. Also migrant farmers, traveling from plantation to plantation in search of day-work. (Thousands upon thousands of them—anywhere else they would be a major phenomenon; in the American south, always overshadowed by slavery.)
 5. Book kind of makes it sound like they're doing worse than slaves, and horribly mistreated.
 5. Don't feel too sorry for them: a fair amount of the work they're searching for is as overseers—people who beat the slaves. Also a lot of them are going to get work as slave-catchers.
 6. But mostly they're regular farmers.
 7. Question: Why do they support slavery? Obviously, some are employed by slavery, but still others live very closely with the *slaves*, smuggling them goods and services, on occasion participating in slave revolts.
 8. Why, then, support slavery?
 9. Probably labor question: If the slaves were set free, will things get even worse for them?
 10. Also, possibly racial: We may be poor, but at least we're still *white*.
 11. W.E.B. DuBois would later come up with the phrase: "psychological wage."

- VII. In short, South is, in many ways, a very stable society—little change, little development, little upheaval. Southerners pride themselves on this, talking about the stability and reliability of their system.
- VIII. But also, of course, massive inequality beneath it all: Slavery. As you can imagine, slavery is just a devastating system, one that is eventually going to draw the country into a really big Civil War.