

STUDIES IN AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY

I.

BLACK SLAVERY

and

CAPITALISM

By John Belisle

II.

**THE RISE AND FALL
OF THE COTTON KINGDOM**

The Ultimate Stage of Chattel Slavery
in the South

By George Novack

BLACK SLAVERY AND CAPITALISM

By John Belisle

Slavery as we have known it in modern times, or in times close to the present, first arose in Greece and Rome in relation to the expanding commercial economies of those states. Whole peoples were conquered, enslaved, and brought to the plantations, mines, and cities of the Greek and Roman Empires.

These slaves had no legal rights. They were bought, sold, and used as objects. Their children inherited the status of slave. Ancient slavery lasted for a thousand years and then, because of factors which are beyond the topic of this talk, it declined. The Roman Empire fell; this slavery fell as well and, after a long transition, feudalism settled over Europe.

Slavery survived in attenuated form during the feudal period. It hardly existed at all in western Europe. In eastern Europe the Slavs were seized by traders and shipped to the Muslim countries of the Near East, where they were sold as slaves. But there was very little slavery within eastern Europe itself.

Two forms of slavery existed in Spain and Portugal during this period. First, there were infidel slaves, non-Christians defeated in battle. They could be bought and sold as were the ancient slaves but their children did not inherit their slave status. There were also Christian slaves who could be used for life by their masters but could not be bought and sold.

During the Renaissance, commercial activity and towns flourished again in Europe. Trade expanded, centering mainly on spices, salt, metals, luxuries, and some slaves from Europe exported to the Muslim countries of North Africa and the Near East. Belgium and Italy became the centers of the first rising merchant capitalists. Portugal, Spain, Holland, England, and France soon were areas of commercial activity as well.

Italy and the countries of the Near East held a monopoly of the luxury and spice trade in the Mediterranean region. Spain and Portugal sought a way to break the monopoly. They looked in two directions: 1) sailing west to find a direct route to India, or 2) sailing south around the tip of Africa.

The Spanish and Portugese searched for routes to India, eager for spice islands and precious metals. They had a strong interest in gold and silver because the economies of western Europe produced very little which could be sold in the markets of the Near East or Asia except for woolen cloth, raw materials, and precious metals. They sought direct routes to India and China so that they could trade their gold directly for spices and thereby escape having to pay a large middleman's charge to the merchants of the Near East through whom they had traded up to then.

Before Columbus discovered America the Portugese had already sailed down the coast of West Africa and established trade relations with the kingdoms they encountered on the way. Slaves were then a minor part of the trade which mainly concerned gold, ivory, and spices. Some slaves were taken to Portugal, which had a severe labor shortage, and converted into slaves for life. However, their children became semi-free peasants and blended in with the rest of the population.

While the Portugese sailed south, the Spanish sailed west and discovered America. The Spanish landed on what is now Haiti and Santo Domingo (which was then called Hispaniola). They seized the native Indians -- half a million -- and drove them to labor in the gold mines. Within a period of 15 years 450,000 or 90% of the aboriginal population was wiped out by forced labor in the mines and by famine which the Spanish used to destroy those who resisted.

The Spanish then began to import slaves to Hispaniola. At first these were primarily Christian slaves from Spain itself as well as some black slaves. Plantations were started and in 1515 the first slave-produced sugar from the New World was shipped back to Europe.

England, Holland, and France soon followed suit. They seized islands in the Caribbean which were their first colonies in the Western Hemisphere and, for several hundred years, by far the most important. As time went on these countries, especially England and France, became less concerned with the search for gold and instead turned their attention to the growing of tropical produce such as sugar, cotton, tobacco, indigo, coffee and cocoa. In the 17th century, plantations were begun on the British and French islands of the West Indies, growing crops which were shipped to be processed by the developing industries of western Europe.

It was at this point, at the beginning of the 17th century that the colonial powers of Europe faced a key question of their entire development -- the relation of land and labor in the American colonies.

Land and Labor in the American Colonies

They had at this time only a limited amount of land, but it was rich sub-tropical land stolen from the Indians who had been exterminated in the Caribbean region. They had rich virgin land but they had no labor to work the land on plantations -- and that was the key: it had to be on plantations. They could not allow labor to be imported in the form of small subsistence farmers producing just enough to feed themselves, because then where would the profit come from? There had to be plantations producing commercial crops -- crops which could be carried by the ships of England and France, taken back to the "mother" country, processed, and sold throughout Europe at very high rates of profit.

The land had to be settled. But it had to be settled in the form of commercial plantations and with bound labor in one form

or another -- labor which was not free, which could not go off on its own, as a free peasant could, to settle a farm in the wilderness. They had to have bound labor which could be forced to work on the plantations.

The first solution which England and France found for the problem of the plantations in the 17th century was not slavery. It was the bound labor of the poor whites of Europe. For the next 200 years most whites who came to the Western Hemisphere came in one of the following forms.

First, there were "redemptioners" who agreed to work as servants for a number of years in return for their passage to the New World. They were given glowing descriptions of a rich continent with unlimited opportunity especially as compared to the poverty and falling standard of living in western Europe itself. They were told that, in return for from 4 to 7 years of labor for a master, they would be given free passage to America.

A second form was that of peasants driven off their lands by their landlords who became paupers, petty criminals, and vagabonds. All of these, when arrested by the sheriff, would be threatened with hanging unless they agreed to be transported as servants to the Americas.

Those convicted of serious crimes would often be offered the choice of hanging or going as servants for long terms -- 10, 20 years or life. An important source of servants for the English plantations were prisoners of war from Cromwell's conquest of Scotland and Ireland. More than 100,000 Irish prisoners were sent to the British islands of the West Indies. Religious and political prisoners were also sent to work on the plantations.

Lastly, a trade developed, especially in England, of kid-napped children, who were sold to the captains of ships and taken to the colonies. There they would be sold as servants and would be forced to work for a master until the age of 21.

Although convicts and prisoners of war served much longer terms, ranging as high as life, most servants served terms of 4 to 7 years. In addition to the fact that most were servants for only a limited time, servants had a completely different legal position than that of slaves.

According to legal theory, servants had signed a contract with their master to give a number of years of service. Once they had entered into such a contract, that number of years of service, say the next seven, were the property of the master, to do with as he saw fit within limits set by law. He could keep them himself and have his servant work for him on his ship, plantation, or business. He could sell that service, and the servant with it, to someone else.

Whole communities came from western Germany as servants. The different members of a family, each with their different ages, would often face different terms of service. When they landed, their

service was offered for sale and often families would be broken up as the families of slaves were later. Despite this, the legal position of servants was much better than that of slaves.

Servants were legally viewed as free men who temporarily found themselves in an unfree state. But they still retained their basic rights as citizens. They could give testimony in court. They could sue their master for breach of contract or for extreme cruelty. Most important, after a number of years, the vast majority of servants did become free men. Upon becoming free their masters were required to give them a suit of clothes, some supplies, and a sum of money to start them off on their own. Even if they were servants for life, their children did not inherit the status of servant from them.

This contrasts with chattel slavery, both as it existed in the ancient world, and as it soon developed in the colonies. Slaves had no legal rights whatsoever. Their slavery was not a personal estate like that of a servant; they were the chattel property of their masters, exactly like any object would be. The children of a slave were automatically slaves. Slaves were slaves forever and never could attain their freedom unless their master chose to free them. They could not testify in court, except against another slave. They could not defend themselves when attacked by a white man.

Slaves had no legal recourse whatsoever. They were simply objects under law. Servants had a different status. They were a semi-free class and for a hundred years they built and worked the plantations of the sugar islands and the southern mainland. In fact, the servant form of bound labor was so predominant that many of the Indians who were captured, and some of the first Africans who were brought to the Americas, very often were made not slaves but servants for long periods ranging up to life.

As the 17th century progressed the plantations grew phenomenally and soon a chronic labor shortage appeared. The plantations were expanding, their exports were growing, the European markets were expanding rapidly. This led to a labor shortage which grew increasingly severe just at the time that the policy of England and France toward emigration to the Americas began to shift.

These countries were shifting from an emphasis on trade and gold to an emphasis on trade and home manufacture. They were becoming increasingly interested in developing their own export capacity and their own industrial strength. They no longer wished to ship the poor of their own countries abroad, as they had a few years before, considering them superfluous. Now the poor were found to be useful in keeping wages down and for keeping the standard of living falling, as it did throughout this entire period in western Europe.

There was an additional problem in the colonies. Ex-servants almost always left the plantations, refusing to remain there working for wages, and became small farmers working their own plots of land. In early Virginia, two-thirds of all land-owners were small holders, who owned no servants or slaves. As late as 1670 only 5% of the population of Virginia were black servants or slaves.

The white servants were obviously only a temporary solution. The old problem of land and labor kept recurring as the market for colonial produce expanded, as new islands were settled, and as the plantations multiplied. Again the demand arose for more bound labor, for labor bound for a longer period of time.

It was at this juncture that the commercial nations of western Europe turned to what became the central axis of their economic development for 200 years -- taking the land stolen from the Indians and working it with labor stolen from Africa. With this came the most extensive slave trade in the history of the world. By conservative estimates 20,000,000 or, by more expansive estimates, 50,000,000 slaves were transported from Africa to the Western Hemisphere during this period. On this basis was laid the foundations of modern capitalism.

Early Slavery

What was the character of slavery itself? The slaves were purchased from dealers in Africa -- the merchants and kings of the African kingdoms. They were loaded on the slave ships, packed in spaces of five feet by three by a foot and a half, chained together and brought across the Atlantic. Revolts occurred at the point of embarkation and aboard ship. Approximately 20% of the slaves died on the passage. Of the white slaving crews 20% died each year as well.

When the slaves reached the islands they were sold, branded and then broken by professional "slave breakers." They were then placed in gangs of several hundred and put to work in the sugar fields. A system of terror was developed on the plantations, which the masters found necessary to subdue the slaves and to drive them to work in the fields.

The masters invented a hundred different forms of whipping, each with its own name, type of whip, and its own refinements. They poured ashes, cinders, and salt into wounds. They notched or chopped off the ears of slaves. They mutilated and castrated slaves. They roasted them, burned them, packed them with gunpowder and exploded them, and fed them alive to insects. These were not isolated individual examples of sadism. They were an integral part of slavery as a system, necessary to terrorize the slave population as a whole and to drive them to work on the plantations.

Such bestiality was fundamental to slavery as a system. It also was a constituent of ancient slavery on the Roman latifundia and in the mines, where slaves were worked to death in a predetermined number of years, and new slaves purchased to replace them. It was part of modern slavery, especially on the early plantations in the Caribbean, where slaves were imported and died off at a much faster rate than they themselves reproduced. Here it was judged cheaper to buy new slaves than to wait for the young to grow up.

The slaves had many forms of resistance. There were revolts. Instances of arson and poisoning were common. Slaves burned fields, plantation houses, and wherever possible their masters. Constant complaints appear in court records of slaves poisoning their masters, overseers, and in many cases themselves or other slaves out of sheer spite toward their masters.

There were frequent escapes and whole colonies of escaped slaves called "maroons" lived in the mountains. In some cases they had treaties with England, France or Spain recognizing their independence. This was the case in Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, and Venezuela. In addition there were the universal forms of passive resistance: the destruction of farm animals and tools, poor work, stopping work whenever possible, the theft of everything in sight, pretended illness or, in the case of women, pretended pregnancy, and pretended stupidity when whites were around.

On the basis of the terror, and despite all resistance, the richest colonies in world history were built. Haiti, one-half of one small island, absorbed two-thirds of the foreign trade of France. Little Barbados, too small to appear on a world map and smaller than the area of most cities, brought more direct profits to the British Empire than New York, Pennsylvania, and New England combined.

Slavery and the slave trade were the key factors in developing the trade and industries of western Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. The triangular trade is often mentioned in history books, although its pivotal importance is never clearly explained. It operated as follows: the slavers (who absorbed from an average of 1/5 to as much as 1/3, in the case of Liverpool, of the ships of the ports of England) set out loaded with industrial goods -- guns, powder, metal utensils, textiles, alcohol -- and sailed to the coast of Africa, where they exchanged these for slaves. The slaves were then shipped to the West Indies where they were exchanged for sugar, cotton, tobacco, indigo, etc. This colonial produce was then taken back to the developing industrial countries, processed, and sold at home and throughout the European market.

The mainland colonies which now form part of the United States were an integral part of the triangular trade. They existed largely as adjuncts of the slave plantations on the islands. In the South were plantations growing tobacco, cotton, some sugar, and rice. The tobacco plantations of Virginia were the most important on the mainland. There was only a little cotton and sugar grown farther south and the rice grown in South Carolina was used to feed the slaves in the West Indies.

The Middle Colonies produced food and livestock which were shipped, not to England, but to the Caribbean where they were used to feed the slaves and their masters and to stock the plantations. The island sugar plantations were strictly one-crop farms, producing no food or livestock of their own. The English colonies imported almost all their necessities from the American mainland.

New England fitted into this economy as the builder of ships, distiller of rum, grower of grains and vegetables, exporter of fish, and as the merchant handling the traffic of the other colonies.

On the triangular trade and related industries rose the commercial classes of England, France and New England. It was on the basis of industrial goods sold in Africa, slaves shipped to the islands, and colonial produce processed and sold in Europe, that the shipping, the capital, and the early industries developed which formed

the indispensable prerequisites for the Industrial Revolution. The discovery of the Americas itself had been made possible by the earlier rise of merchant capital in western Europe. But it was only with the discovery of America, its colonization, and the growth of the slave trade that the real development of European capitalism could occur in that critical period between the appearance of merchant capital in the Renaissance and late Middle Ages and the rise of the Industrial Revolution.

The colonies were administered by mercantile monopolies and each colony was tightly controlled by its mother country. It could only buy manufactured goods from its mother country and could only ship its produce to her. The mother country monopolized trade with her colonies and in turn gave preference to the products of her own colonies.

This relationship gave rise to the most powerful political force in England at this time -- the West India Interest, consisting of the sugar planters, merchants, and manufacturers processing colonial produce or selling their products as part of the slave trade. Birmingham, one of the principal centers of the Industrial Revolution in England, exported between 100,000 and 150,000 guns a year to Africa during the 18th century, as one small part of the slave trade.

In England, France, Spain, Portugal, and the American colonies there was universal support among all free classes for slavery. The Church of England and the Catholic Church were directly involved in the slave trade and the ownership of slaves.

When the first bill for the abolition of the slave trade was defeated in the English Parliament, the churches of Bristol, a major port, rang their bells for days in rejoicing. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Barbaros forbade the instruction of Christianity to its own slaves, and each of the slaves owned by the Society were branded with the word "society" to distinguish them from the slaves of the laity. Indicative of this whole period of history a pious English captain, while loading a cargo of slaves off the coast of Africa, wrote a famous tune, "How Sweet is the Name of Jesus."

By the middle of the 18th century there was a delicate equilibrium based on the slave economy between England, France, Spain, and mainland America. Before examining this equilibrium and the forces which undermined it, let's look briefly at the slave trade in relation to Africa itself.

The African Slave Trade

Black Africa during the period of the slave trade was characterized by Iron Age cultures, approximately comparable technologically to the early feudal period in Europe. Social, political, religious, and artistic developments were rich and complex. Many kingdoms and empires had histories of several hundred or several thousand years. The two preeminent regions were the forest belt near the Gulf of Guinea and the city states along the east coast.

For several thousand years prior to and during the period of the slave trade itself an extensive migration of peoples took place in Africa. Kingdoms rose, gained dominance, and then were conquered in turn. Complex relations of political and economic dominance developed. Conquered peoples were forced to work for their conquerors; however, slavery as it was known in the ancient world or in modern times did not exist in Black Africa itself. Conquered peoples were held in a relation approximating that of serfdom in feudal Europe, if we may use a very rough analogy to a specific stage of European development.

Conquered peoples were not held as chattel slaves. They were allowed to own property, give witness in court, function within their own established kinship and social structures, and take part in many religious and civil ceremonies. These "serfs" sometimes held "serfs" themselves and cases occurred of kings and ministers of African kingdoms who had themselves once been serfs.

Throughout the entire slave trade from 1480 to 1860 the Europeans were restricted to the coast of Africa and succeeded only in establishing a few forts along the coast and on nearby islands. No part of Africa was directly conquered by Europeans during the slave trade, with the exception of the cities of the east coast, which were destroyed. The most important developments took place in three different areas: 1) the Congo and northern Angola, 2) the east coast along Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, and 3) the region around the Gulf of Guinea.

The Portugese established contact with the king of the Congo in 1482 on one of their attempted voyages to India. He was soon converted to Christianity and baptised Dom Alfonso. He sent his son to study in Spain and his son became the first Black African bishop, ordained by the Pope in 1495.

There is preserved in Portugal an extensive correspondence between the King of the Congo and the King of Portugal. The King of the Congo asked for missionaries, doctors, and craftsmen practicing trades unknown in the area, such as shipbuilding. The King of Portugal sent greetings, offered pious sermons, and asked for gold, ivory, spices and slaves.

Prior to the slave trade there had of course been wars in the Congo. Peoples were conquered, but the actual loss of life was limited. Very often wars were political conflicts between ruling groups in the aristocracy that left the vast mass of the population relatively unconcerned except when an army marched through the immediate neighborhood. These wars gave way to commercial wars for slaves, in which one faction of the Congolese upper classes against another, one people against another, was driven into slaving in order to be able to trade with the Portugese. The critical factor which forced the development of commercial wars for slaves was the massive importation of guns.

Guns offered an overwhelming military advantage to whomever possessed them. An army with guns could defeat its adversaries. As soon as one faction acquired guns from the Portugese all others were

driven to acquire them as well. Without guns, you would be defeated and your people enslaved. With guns, possibly you could defeat others and enslave them. This was the wedge driven in by the Europeans and throughout the whole slave trade guns, cannon and powder were the most important elements of the trade in terms of European exports to Africa.

Only after 300 years of slave trade and after 5,000,000 people had been taken from the Congo alone did Europe consent to bring the "civilization" which Dom Alfonso had requested 450 years ago. Except that it was not what he had expected. It was, instead, the modern wage slavery of the mines of Katanga; it was the millions massacred by the Belgians in their search for wild rubber in 1900; and it was the civilization of Cuban counterrevolutionaries flying American planes and dropping napalm on villages during the "Congo Crisis."

The east coast of Africa was quite different from the Congo. Here ancient trading cities had existed for several thousand years -- cities which appear in ancient Greek and Egyptian records. These city states had extensive trade with India and China, dealing in gold, ivory, metals, rare woods, leather, and a limited number of slaves. There was a strong Muslim and Arabic influence in the cultures of this region.

These cities were razed to the ground by the Portuguese navy. Year after year the Portuguese fleet, armed with cannon, sailed into the Indian Ocean, leveled the black states along the east coast and the Arab states along the south coast of Arabia, and captured, for a short time, the monopoly of trade with India.

Europe largely ignored this region for the next several hundred years until finally there came a period of intensive slaving along the east coast during the 18th and 19th centuries. The trade centered in Mozambique and Zanzibar with a large number of slaves being exported to Brazil, Cuba, and the United States.

The west African region bordering on the Gulf of Guinea was the most developed. A large number of ancient states existed and there was a great deal of resistance to direct European conquest. Unlike the Congo or the east coast, the peoples of this region had contact with a dozen European powers and were able, to a limited degree, to play one off against the other.

In pre-slaving times there were the following areas near the Gulf of Guinea: 1) the coast which was poor and sparsely settled, 2) the forest belt with the kingdoms of the Yoruba, Benin, Adansi, Denkira, and Ashanti, 3) the savannah states of the Ghana, Mali, Songi, and Hausa, and 4) to the north, the desert kingdoms of the Berbers and Arabs. The forest and savannah states were the most powerful; trade routes lay through them to the Arabs in the north.

As soon as the slave trade appeared, the relation of forces between these regions became reversed. Powerful city states arose along the coast and the balance of power among the kingdoms of the interior shifted under the impact of the slave trade and the commercial wars it unleashed. Both republics and monarchies appeared along the coast as well as unique political forms which were an adaptation

to commercial slavery. One of these was the "house system," a semi-feudal and semi-commercial relationship of property, kinship, and bondage, headed by a single powerful trader, made up of his whole clan and all their bondsmen.

Beyond the coast, in the forest and savannah where most of the slaving was done, the existing empires were put under pressure from the new coastal states. As in the Congo, they had to choose between being enslaved or going into the slave trade themselves -- or both; they had to choose between falling under the guns of others or acquiring guns themselves.

Extensive commercial wars were fought over a period of centuries and two important kingdoms of the forest region rose to the height of their power as slaving empires -- the Ashanti and the Dahomey. After a hundred years of trading slaves and guns through the coastal states, they themselves conquered the coast and became the key centers of the slave trade.

Because of the nature of the goods imported -- guns, gunpowder, luxuries for the ruling classes and alcohol -- no African economic development could conceivably be stimulated by the slave trade with Europe. On the contrary, what did occur was a mass export of peoples; and even worse, a savagely destructive effect on the economic, social, political and cultural relations of the African peoples affected.

The ruling African military castes around the Gulf of Guinea turned inward upon themselves and degenerated. Human sacrifice at the death of a king, which had been practiced to a limited extent before the slave trade in a manner similar to that of Europe or Asia at an earlier time, expanded greatly. As the slave trade grew so did human sacrifice and violence on the part of the ruling military castes against their own peoples. Later, as the slave trade declined and as direct European conquest threatened in the 19th century, these ruling classes turned to human sacrifice in a frenzy of self-defense of their vanishing power.

In the early 19th century, whenever a king or major political figure died, sometimes hundreds of bondsmen were killed. In the city of Benin, just before the final European conquest and just after a mass sacrifice in 1848 the situation had come to such a state that a group was formed among the plantation bondsmen themselves, called the "bloodmen," who marched into town in force whenever a noble died to insure that no human sacrifices would take place.

With this brief sketch of the impact of the slave trade and the commercial wars on Africa itself we return to the development of Europe and mainland America.

Evolution of the Slave Economy

Just prior to the beginning of the American Revolution this was the basic situation. The sugar islands were the key colonies of England and France; the triangular trade was the foundation of their rising commercial and industrial classes; and the mainland American colonies were adjuncts which sold their food, livestock,

and materials to the sugar islands. Since the beginning of the 18th century, sugar production on Haiti and the French islands had grown rapidly at the expense of production on the British islands. Along with the expansion of French sugar production went the expansion of illegal trade between the French islands and the British colonies on the mainland.

Under the mercantile system the English mainland colonies were closely linked to England herself and to the English sugar islands. In order to maintain the equilibrium that had existed during the 17th and early 18th centuries two things were required: 1) the British islands had to produce as much sugar as the mainland demanded for its own consumption and for distillation into rum and they had to produce it at competitive prices, and 2) the British islands had to expand rapidly enough to provide a growing market for the food, livestock, and materials produced by the mainland.

These requirements began to hold less and less. The newer French islands, with virgin land and a massive importation of slaves, undersold the British islands. Mainland trade soon shifted to the French islands. Mainland merchants still sold goods to the British colonies, but instead of sugar or molasses, they demanded cash which they used to buy molasses from the French.

By 1760, approximately 90% of the molasses imported into New England for distillation into rum came not from the British islands but from the French. The British West India Interest was furious. Still all-powerful, it pushed through the Parliament the Sugar Acts and the other measures which were directly aimed at stopping the trade between mainland America and the French sugar islands, and which were the prime provoker of the American Revolution.

The success of the American Revolution itself marked the beginning of the end for the British sugar islands. U.S. trade with France and the French islands increased even further. Haiti, the richest colony in world history, saw its population double in six years and, as I mentioned before, this one island absorbed two-thirds of the foreign trade of France. Because of Haiti, Guadeloupe, and her other islands France firmly held the world monopoly of sugar production.

Pitt, the prime minister of England, saw this development and made a calculation. Further slave trade was almost useless for the British islands since the older ones were already becoming exhausted. The British plantations already produced more sugar than England herself could consume. The French islands, which had been settled later, produced sugar more cheaply, and undersold the British throughout the European market. British sugar had to be subsidized by the government in order to be able to compete with French sugar. The British islands already had enough slaves, the newer French islands did not yet have enough. Therefore, abolish the slave trade -- perhaps.

Pitt considered abolishing the slave trade and induced Wilberforce, one of the first English liberal abolitionists, to introduce an abolition bill in Parliament in 1787. The bill was

defeated by a combination of the newer British colonies that were still importing slaves and the merchants and manufacturers who were engaged in the slave trade. Pitt, however, had one last chance at domination of the world sugar market and slave trade. What gave him his opening was the French Revolution. The people who defeated him were the slaves of Haiti.

The Black Revolution in Haiti

In 1789 France held the sugar monopoly. Reprocessed colonial goods were the key to French commercial and industrial development. Haiti, France's richest colony, was at the height of its prosperity in 1789. The population of the island was divided into a number of classes and castes. There were the white plantation owners, the royal bureaucrats and nobles, the poor whites, a small number of mulattoes (racially discriminated against by all whites but themselves owners, in some cases, of large slave plantations), some free blacks, and 500,000 slaves.

The French Revolution broke out in 1789 and its struggles were echoed among the free classes and castes in Haiti. Bureaucrats, planters, poor whites, mulattoes, and free blacks fought each other. Factions formed, frequently changing sides, and widespread violence flared up among these upper strata of Haitian society. Finally, as the French Revolution deepened, the slaves stepped in, unleashing the greatest guerrilla war in world history before Vietnam.

In July, 1791, a mass insurrection broke out on the North Plain, the richest section of Haiti. The plantations were fired and for three weeks the people of Le Cap, the provincial capital, were almost unable to tell the difference between day and night. By night the sky was red with the burning plantations, by day the sky was black with smoke and ashes. The whites responded with terror but the slave insurrection spread and moved from victory to victory. The British, seeing France's weakness in the midst of the French Revolution, first supplied arms to the slaves and then, at the invitation of the French slavemasters, invaded Haiti.

If England could capture Haiti and the other French islands she would once again hold the world sugar monopoly and the English slave trade would expand as never before. This did not happen. The British invaded. The slaves resisted. They were fighting the French, and half fighting the British who had supplied them with arms and who were attacking those French units that did not accept the British invasion. The Spanish marched in from Santo Domingo at one point. A very confused situation arose. Meanwhile, the French Revolution itself was driving toward its peak, which lasted from March, 1793 to July, 1794; and in February, 1794, the National Convention of France, without debate, abolished slavery throughout the French Empire. When the news reached Haiti, the slaves immediately turned and fell upon the British army.

In the three years from 1793 to 1796 England lost 100,000 men in the West Indies, 60,000 of them in Haiti alone. These were the crack troops of the British army, all volunteers, professional

soldiers for life, the equal of any special forces group today. They were smashed by the insurrectionary slaves of Haiti.

In France, however, while the slaves were defeating the British in Haiti, the counterrevolution had begun and Napoleon was moving toward power. Once peace was reestablished with England, Napoleon sent an invasion fleet to Haiti with 20,000 troops commanded by his brother-in-law Le Clerc.

Thousands of slaves were executed -- hung, burned, fed to dogs in the arena, fed alive to insects, executed by every conceivable form of torture. The slaves retreated, adopting a scorched earth policy, and the French terror was met in kind. As the French army marched across the countryside it met burned fields, poisoned wells, piles of white bodies rotting in the sun; and when they finally reached the mountain fortresses held by the slaves they were greeted by slaves singing the same French revolutionary songs they themselves had sung a few short years before.

The first French invasion force was annihilated. Of 20,000 men at most a thousand survived and escaped. A second invasion force was sent and Napoleon openly proclaimed the restoration of slavery. Again mass executions and terror -- nothing worked. The slaves responded in kind and the French were met with a courage they found amazing. They simply could not believe it.

Slaves died laughing. Slaves, forced to die burning, sometimes threw themselves into the fires. Many hung themselves when mounting the gallows. Learned Frenchmen observed that perhaps this was due to an unusual Negro characteristic that, when dying, Negroes were insensitive to pain. This had never occurred to anyone before but, as usual, white Europeans and colonial masters could not conceive of the force of a revolution in progress, of what it means to the morale of a people. As Le Clerc, commander of the first French invasion, had said, "Our army no longer inspires terror and that is the greatest misfortune that can ever befall an army."

The final campaign by the ex-slaves of Haiti, who had considered themselves up to this point as part of the French Revolution, was fought under a new flag. From the old red, white and blue flag of France they tore out the white, leaving the red and blue, and inscribed on it the words "Freedom or Death." This flag flew over the final campaign that drove the French into the sea.

The French made their final stand at Le Cap. The slaves assaulted day after day. Thousands upon thousands died, until finally the French were literally driven into the sea and were forced to surrender to the British, who were waiting off-shore.

In 12 years the slaves of Haiti had risen, had defeated their masters, had annihilated 60,000 British troops, had invaded the Spanish half of the island, and had annihilated two French invasion forces totalling about 40,000 men.

Le Clerc had said before sailing with his force for Haiti: "All the niggers, when they see an army will lay down their arms. They will be only too happy when we pardon them." Forty years later,

one of the few French generals who survived the invasion wrote in his memoirs, "What men these blacks are. How they fight and how they die. I have seen a solid column, torn by grape shot from four cannon, advance without taking a step back. The more they fell the greater seemed the courage of the rest. They advanced singing. One must have seen this bravery to have any conception of it. Large ditches, an excellent artillery, perfect soldiers gave us a great advantage, but many a day that massed square that marched singing to its death lighted by a magnificent sun remained in my thoughts and even today, after 40 years, still lives as vividly in my imagination as in the moments I saw it." Quite a difference in attitude, produced by contact with the reality of a mass of men determined on "liberty -- or death."

The United States and England quickly established relations with the Republic of Haiti and, in typically civilized European fashion, England made its last intervention in Haiti -- for a while. In the course of negotiations for diplomatic recognition the English representative made one simple demand: that the remaining French whites on the island be massacred, which was done in 1803. This was designed to drive a final wedge between Haiti and any possibility of reconciliation with France.

The loss of Haiti was a critical blow to world slavery. It destroyed the French sugar monopoly and eliminated Britain's last hope of ever regaining it. Once the United States and Haiti gained their independence there was no way out for the British islands of the West Indies.

The Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies

From 1800 on their plantations suffered under a crisis of overproduction. And in 1807, the British slavemasters of the West Indies pushed through Parliament the abolition of the British slave trade. The slaveholders of the old islands needed no more slaves and wanted no more competition. The rising English industrial capitalists wanted no more expansion of British sugar production, which required extensive government subsidies to compete on the world market. It was not only the British industrialists but above all the British slaveholders, who came out for the abolition of the slave trade. And for the next 20 years England stationed warships off the coast of Africa with orders to seize any ship from any country engaged in the slave trade.

This last stand of what was left of the West India Interest lasted only a short time. The Industrial Revolution, which had been made possible by the rise of the commercial classes and by slavery and the slave trade, had now passed beyond that early stage of development. The English industrialists could produce their goods better and more cheaply than any others in the world. All they needed in return was cheap raw materials. They needed no tariffs to protect their markets and wanted none directed against them. The laws that forced them to buy their sugar, above world market prices, from a decaying group of British slaveholders, were viewed as outrageous.

The so-called Reform Movement triumphed in England in 1832 and marked the rise to power of the industrial capitalist class.

After coming to power the British industrialists moved to systematically destroy the remaining economic and political power of the British planters and landlords. In 1833 they abolished slavery in the British Empire. Three years later, in 1836, the sugar monopoly was modified to allow the importation of British sugar from India on equal terms with that of the West Indies. And in 1846 the sugar duties were equalized for all sugar imported and wheat subsidies to British landlords were abolished. These two classes, the planters and landlords, never recovered.

However, this ascendancy of the British industrial capitalists, who abolished slavery in the British islands (and likewise that of the French industrialists who abolished slavery in the French colonies in 1848 following the Revolution of that year) -- this ascendancy was marked by a renewed interest in slavery elsewhere. This period of rapid industrial expansion in England and to a lesser degree France was directly linked to the expansion of slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States.

When the British industrialists abolished slavery, they immediately dropped the slave patrols off the coast of Africa. The slave patrols to capture ships engaged in the slave trade had been sent by the British slaveholders -- the industrialists who had abolished British slavery stopped the slave patrols, outfitted new slaving ships on the sly, and in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, financed the slave trade on an ever larger scale.

The last major expansion of slavery in the western world came precisely during this period of the Industrial Revolution in England and France between 1830 and 1860. It was based on the coffee of Brazil, the sugar of Cuba, and the cotton of the United States. Cotton was indispensable for the British textile industry and the most important single staple at this stage of industrial development.

Slavery in the United States

In drawing toward a close, let's look briefly at the evolution of slavery in the United States. Colonial slavery in the mainland colonies was part of the British system and part of the triangular trade. Like the sugar plantations of the West Indies, the tobacco plantations which were the most important on the mainland produced an important export crop which was shipped for processing and sale to England. The rice plantations along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia sent food to the West Indies. The middle colonies sent livestock, food, and materials to the islands. New England built ships, distilled molasses into rum, engaged in the fishing industry, and shipped wheat and vegetables to the West Indies.

At the time of American independence a temporary political bloc was formed between the northern merchants and the southern slaveholders of the older slave states, such as Maryland and Virginia, which passed that section of the Constitution outlawing the slave trade after 1807. This was done for two reasons: 1) the northern merchants were moving toward seizing political power, which they held briefly until 1800, and they wanted to limit and undermine the strength of the slave states, and 2) the slaveholders of the older slave states could not see a rapidly growing market for their produce -- prior to the invention of the cotton gin -- and were opposed to any new competition which a large scale expansion of

slavery would involve for them. The old southern slavemasters and the northern merchants briefly combined to outlaw the American slave trade.

The situation completely changed after the invention of the cotton gin and the rise of the British and New England textile industries. Slavery in the United States went through a tremendous expansion. When Jefferson and the Democratic Party were elected in 1800 and the Federalists were defeated, it marked the rise to power of the slaveholders who ruled in Washington from 1800 to 1860. Throughout this entire period leading up to the Civil War the foreign policy, wars, tariffs, and policy toward the western territories on the part of the federal government were a function of conflict between the slaveholders and first the northern merchants and later the northern industrialists. But at each step along the way the slaveholders held the upper hand and dominated the federal government -- until 1860.

This major expansion of American slavery was directly linked to the rapid growth of British and American industry, of which it was a product. However, as the industrial capitalists arose in the United States, the southern slaveholders began to see the same fate threatening them as that which had overtaken the British slaveholders in 1833. And when the Republican Party took power in 1860 at the head of a new political coalition of industrial capitalists, western farmers, and a section of northern workers, the slaveholders saw the beginning of the end of their reign.

They attempted to forestall this by a counterrevolution which precipitated the Civil War. In the Civil War American slavery was smashed by northern industrial power and by 200,000 black troops, who formed in the last years of the war that component of the Union Army which made victory possible.

Chattel slavery was illegalized by the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in December 1865. Abolition soon came in most other countries where slavery still survived, such as Brazil and Cuba. Slavery was abolished there for different reasons than in England, France or the United States, where the industrialists had to destroy the economic and political power of the slaveholders before being able to concentrate complete power in their own hands. The industrial capitalists used slavery; they built their shipping in the slave and colonial trade; they raised large sums of capital from the profits of slavery; they used plantation produce as the raw material for their growing industries. But once they had developed their own independent strength they turned and destroyed slavery in order to eliminate the power of the slaveholding class, which stood as an obstacle to their own dominance.

The Resistance of the Slaves

The cases of Cuba and Brazil were different. Slavery as a system was profitable vis-a-vis other early forms of agricultural production only where there were vast tracts of cheap virgin land, large reserves of slave labor available, and only a limited free labor force. Once production expanded beyond a certain point, once land became scarce and more expensive, and once there arose large

numbers of poor peasants forced to work for pennies a day, as is the case in Asia, Africa or Latin America today, slavery lost its relative profitability as a system. The basic reason why it lost its relative profitability once production expanded and the agricultural labor force increased was direct and very simple -- the resistance of the slaves themselves.

If the slaves had ever accepted slavery as a system even to one-tenth the degree that a worker in this country accepts capitalism, or to one-tenth the degree that a feudal peasant in Europe accepted, as a God-given attribute of the Universe, his relation to his feudal lord, if slavery had ever been able to get one small part of that acceptance, it would still be with us to one degree or another today. The point is that it could not.

The slaves resisted every day in every way to an extent completely unequaled in any other system of production. The revolts are the most dramatic instances. Revolutions such as that in Haiti are inspiring and have important lessons to teach us today. Slaves destroyed the farm animals -- that is why mules were used in the South -- because the slaves destroyed the horses. Only the strongest, crudest plows could be used because the slaves did everything possible to destroy the tools. They burned, poisoned, lied, pretended sickness, and stole everything in sight.

And every slave who poisoned, every slave who burned, every slave who stole one small thing was driving a nail into the coffin of slavery. Each act of resistance added up to make the system, in the long run, completely unprofitable in competition with a larger and more rapidly expanding organization of production -- that of capital and free wage labor.

Two things, therefore, were crucial in the destruction of slavery in the western world: 1) the mass resistance of the slaves themselves, and 2) the development of a different system of productive relations, capitalism, which reintroduced slavery, used it, fed off of it, went beyond it, and then destroyed it.

We can say without any exaggeration at all that slavery, the slave trade, the discovery of the Americas, and the destruction of the Indians were the basis for the development and expansion of modern capitalism in western Europe. They were indispensable factors in developing the commerce, industries, technology, and social classes out of which later rose the Industrial Revolution. It was on the basis of slavery and the slave trade that the modern capitalist class grew and came to political power -- both the commercial capitalists of the 18th and the industrial capitalists of the 19th centuries, the direct forefathers of those who rule the western world today.

The Lessons of History

Understanding this period of history has great importance today. The facts themselves are important, overcoming the lies and fabrications fed to us in the schools and colleges by the intellectual call boys of the ruling class. Their systematic distortions are an organic product of this system and its ruling class.

Understanding the past and seeing where this system really came from gives us a knowledge, a strength and a perspective. The past period enable us to see how history has really evolved -- how a whole system of production rises, flourishes for centuries, rules, and then falls, bringing down into total ruin ruling classes and castes that considered themselves immortal.

We see the British West Indians, riding in their liveried coaches through the streets of London with wealth such as no Englishman had seen before, who thought they would rule the world forever. We see the Haitian slavemasters, at the peak of their power in 1789, who ten short years later were destroyed and massacred. We see the southern slavemasters, during the boom of the mid-1850s. If you had gone among any of them and told them that in ten short years their system would lie burning to the ground, cracking under the advance of 200,000 black soldiers and under the flying columns of Sherman and Sheridan, they would never have believed it. "Impossible, outrageous," they would have said; "we have a sacred system of enterprise, we have a new frontier, we have a great society. Southern slavery is the greatest civilization the world has ever seen. It rivals Greece and Rome -- in fact, it's better because we speak English. We are on the threshold of a new expansion. We have only to break away from these miserable industrialists, free farmers, and wage workers, we have only to break away from these loathsome northern institutions and expand." They nursed plans to annex Cuba and northern Mexico and to re-introduce slavery throughout the Caribbean if the South had won the war.

Understanding the dynamics of this past period, seeing lordly classes at the height of their power and then a mere 10, 20, 50, or 100 years later lying smashed in the dust -- this dialectics of development allows us to understand the present a little better. When we see the British sugar islands in 1700, Haiti in 1789, the South in 1855, when we see these arrogant rulers at their height and then a few short years later -- as history and the evolution of economic forces, classes, and nations move -- when we see them laid low as new social forces rise, we begin to see the parallels with today.

We see 1917 and the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, we see in Vietnam today, in Latin America, in Africa, in Detroit, Harlem, Watts -- anyone with a perspective and a sense of history can see the same preconditions being prepared, can see the forces of the higher system of production and social relations arising to confront and challenge the haughty but outmoded and doomed master class.

We can see parallel preconditions, although in a different form, to those that destroyed the British West Indies, that destroyed the planters of Haiti, that destroyed the Southern slavemasters. Whether it takes 10, 20, 50 or 100 years, these preconditions in Vietnam, in Cuba, in Detroit and elsewhere will eventually mature and wipe the present ruling capitalists of western Europe and America off the face of the earth.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COTTON KINGDOM

The Ultimate Stage of Chattel Slavery in the South

By George Novack

The Civil War, the crucible of the Second American Revolution, was precipitated by the secession of the Southern planters. Therefore, the first question that has to be answered about that civil war is: what drove the slaveholders of the Confederate States to quit the Union they had helped to establish and govern from its beginning?

The causes and circumstances of this momentous decision were complex and cumulative. But the underlying motives for the action of the Southern "lords of the lash" can be traced back to the dynamics of the development of their "peculiar institution:" the chattel slave mode of production.

This type of economy was an historical anachronism not only in the 19th century but even in the 17th century when it was introduced into the Americas. Slavery had largely disappeared from Western Europe by that time. And yet, paradoxically, slave labor experienced a large-scale revival in the New World because of the economic needs of the aggressively expanding and far more advanced bourgeois civilization of the Old World.

In its initial stage American slavery was a collateral branch of commercial capitalism. Negro servitude was implanted in the colonies of the Western hemisphere to produce sugar, tobacco, rice, indigo, hemp and other staples for the world market. Slaves themselves were one of the most lucrative of commodities in the international trade of the time.

In its ultimate stage chattel slavery in the South became an integral part of early 19th century industrial capitalism. Its predominant cash crop, cotton, was also the principal export of the United States, a source of considerable enrichment of the North and the chief raw material of British industry.

This Cotton Kingdom had a meteoric rise -- and a sudden fatal crash. Its downfall was the outcome of the interaction of two opposing economic processes. The slave economy was undergoing serious and critical structural changes just as the far more powerful and progressive industrial capitalism of the North and the small freehold farmers of the Northwest were moving ahead with tremendous strides.

The frictions between these antagonistic forces generated such insoluble conflicts that the heads of the aging and declining slave system felt obliged to take the desperate step of disunion that brought on the Civil War and their own destruction as a class.

This essay will chart the economic evolution of the Cotton

Kingdom from its emergence at the turn of the 19th century up to the departure of the slave power from the Union.

Birth of the Cotton Kingdom

The Cotton Kingdom was the first-born child in the United States of the industrial revolution. The South, cotton, and black slavery are so closely associated that it is difficult to realize that black slavery existed for almost 200 years in the colonies before a cotton crop of any noticeable value was raised in the South. It is recorded that in 1784 eight bags of cotton, shipped to England from the South, were seized at the Custom House as fraudulently entered: "cotton not being a production of the U.S." As late as 1790 the total export of cotton from the U.S. amounted to only 81 bags.

Although the cotton plant could grow throughout the South, it was not commercially cultivated owing to the excessive quantity of labor required to separate the seed from the fiber. The invention of the cotton gin, which enabled one person to clean more cotton in a day than ten could clean by hand in a month, gave an impetus to cotton cultivation which transformed the economy of the slave states. The cotton gin multiplied the productive capacity in the cotton fields a hundredfold, enabling the planters to increase their output from 18 to 93 million pounds from 1801 to 1810.

Cotton, being far more profitable to the planter than any crop ever raised in the South, quickly supplanted tobacco, rice, and indigo as the chief Southern staple. Slavery itself, which originally rested upon the cultivation of these products, came to be supported by bales of cotton.

The Double Revolution in Southern Agriculture and English Industry

This economic revolution in Southern agriculture was the offshoot of the mightier industrial revolution in England. At the beginning of the 19th century steam and the new tool-making machinery were rapidly transforming English manufacture into large-scale industry. In the center of this process stood the textile mills. The introduction of the spinning jenny and the loom together with subsequent mechanical improvements had the same effect upon cotton manufacture as the invention of the cotton gin in the 1790s had upon cotton cultivation. The first provided the technological basis for large-scale agriculture. Jointly they multiplied the productive powers of the workers in both branches of economy to unprecedented dimensions.

The double revolution in the methods of production in English industry and American agriculture gave birth to corresponding social changes on both sides of the Atlantic. In England, the gentleman whom Cobbett addressed as "Seigneurs of the Twist, Sovereigns of the Spinning Jenny, great Yeomen of the Yarn" emerged together with the modern proletariat from the womb of the factory system to engage in bitter struggle with the landed aristocracy. In the U.S. the expansion of cotton culture produced new agricultural magnates who not only superseded the old plantation aristocracy of Virginia as the rulers of Southern society but subsequently also became the political masters of America.

At the same time slavery, which had been loosening its hold upon American economy, was tightly saddled upon the South. Although the upper class opponents of slavery could find no way of eradicating the institution, they had hoped that, with the extinction of the slave trade in 1808 and the inevitable increase in the poor white laboring population, slavery would die as natural an economic death in the South as in the North. The expansion of cotton culture blasted the expectations of such anti-slaveryites. The new machinery pumped fresh blood into the constricting arteries of the slave system in the U.S. which gave it a renewed lease on life. In the process of restoring Southern slavery to vigorous health, the industrial revolution likewise transformed many of its characteristics.

Capitalist production completely destroys the intimate connection between agriculture and manufacture which existed in the slave economy of classical and colonial times and in the feudal economy of the Middle Ages. This division of production takes place not only within each capitalist country according to the degree of its development but on an international scale. Out of the world-wide division of labor created by the extension of capitalist production there develop whole nations devoted either to agriculture or industry and vast regions concentrating upon the cultivation of a single staple. The agricultural countries, confined to the raising of raw materials and foodstuffs required by the industrial nations, become the economic tributaries of the latter. This separation of agriculture from industry was pursued as a conscious policy by the British bourgeoisie in relation to the American colonies before the revolution and was one of the principal causes of their revolt.

But the American economy did not lose its colonial character when the people won their national independence from Great Britain. Until the Civil War the U.S. remained a predominantly agricultural nation, exporting raw materials and foodstuffs to the more advanced industrial powers across the Atlantic. The cotton crop became the leading factor in American economy before the Civil War because textile manufacture was the most important branch of English industry, which in this period meant also capitalist economy. The two branches of production, agricultural and industrial, American and English, stemmed from a single trunk and grew together.

While the English textile mills had a monopoly of the world market in cotton goods, the Southern planters enjoyed a monopoly in supplying them with raw cotton. Three quarters of the Southern cotton crop was exported to Europe in 1860, constituting over one-half of all American exports and four-fifths of England's imports of raw cotton. Wage-slavery in the mills plus chattel slavery on the American plantations was the magic formula that put fabulous profits into the pockets of English textile magnates, enabled Britain's cotton goods to conquer the world market, and extend its boundaries far and wide into such hitherto untouched territories as India and Africa.

Thus the British manufacturers, who prided themselves after 1833 upon the abolition of chattel slavery within their

dominions were the chief beneficiaries of American slavery. Moreover, the most brutal features of "the peculiar institution" of the South were the peculiar product of English industrial capitalism. "The cotton industry, while introducing child slavery into England, gave at the same time an impetus towards the transformation of the slave system of the U.S., which had hitherto been a more or less patriarchal one, into a commercial system of exploitation. Speaking generally, the veiled slavery of the European wage earners became the pedestal of unqualified slavery in the New World." -- Capital, by Karl Marx, Vol. I, p. 842.

As production came to be more and more concentrated upon the cotton crop in response to the ever-increasing demands of the textile industry, the Southern plantations discarded their patriarchal features and became transformed into an exclusively commercial system on the model of the Jamaica sugar estates. The natural economy that had grown up around the plantations was shattered by the impact of the new cotton culture, giving way to the one-sided development characteristic of capitalist economy. Everything on the cotton plantations was subordinated and sacrificed to the raising of that one staple. Household industries were given up; the means of subsistence for the working force and the draft animals were often bought for cash; production was carried on simply and solely for the world market. Having forfeited the last traces of economic independence, the cotton plantations became an integral part of the industrial capitalist system, just as the earlier sugar and tobacco growers belonged to the mercantile system.

Where cotton was King, the whole economy fell under its sovereign sway. The price of land and the price of slaves were regulated by the price of cotton. A prime field hand was generally calculated to be worth one hundred times the prevailing price of cotton per pound. If cotton was bringing twelve cents a pound, an able-bodied black was worth twelve hundred dollars on the slave mart. The prices of slaves fluctuated like any other commodity, giving rise to frenzied speculation among Southern businessmen. Slaves became the favorite form of negotiable property for investment in the South. Between 1820 and 1860 the price of slaves tended to rise as cotton prices fell.

The planter who was an absolute monarch on his own plantation was a helpless subject, however, when he came upon the market with his bales of cotton. There he had no more independent power than a marionette whose strings were attached to the hands of the cotton manufacturers. How the planters danced to the tune of the world market, played through the pipes of the cotton manufacturers, can be seen in the following letter from Col. John B. Lamar to his brother-in-law, dated Feb. 9, 1845. Lamar was then managing his family plantations in Georgia. "Cotton is dull -- prices have receded a little and the whole world of planters, buyers, etc. are on tip-toe for the news by the steamer which left Liverpool on the 4th of February. My prayers are fervent for advises of a ha'penny advance & large scale, great demand for cotton goods, spinners prosperous, corn plenty & all that sort of parlance, so interesting to us poor toads under a harrow, yclept planters of cotton."

The planters were equally at the mercy of the market when

they came to buy their supplies or to borrow money. Under these conditions the mind of the cotton planter was as completely dominated by capitalist ideas as the price of his products was controlled by the capitalist market. Whether the planter was a resident producer or an absentee operator who hired an overseer to manage his estates, he regarded himself as a businessman who invested capital in land, slaves and other means of production and expected an ample rate of return upon his investment. The cotton plantation was operated as a large-scale commercial enterprise and its accounts reckoned in terms of annual profit and loss. The planters prided themselves on being the custodians of their own special way of life. However, they were actually subjected to capitalist conditions, connections and concepts almost as strongly as the merchant who bought the cotton or the manufacturer who had it spun and woven into cloth.

The slave economy of the South had a peculiarly combined character. It was fundamentally an archaic precapitalist mode of production which had become impregnated with the substance and spirit of bourgeois civilization by its subordination to the system of industrial capitalism.

The Form of Agriculture and the Form of Labor

Black slavery was originally established in North America because of the absence of an adequate labor supply, after experiments with Indian and white servitude had failed. This same cause was operative on the frontier wherever the lack of labor was keenly felt. The early settlers in the Indiana Territory, mostly from Virginia, Kentucky, and other slave states, vainly petitioned Congress in 1802 and again in 1806 to allow slavery there on the ground that they were in great need of labor and were accustomed to secure it from slaves.

But there were other reasons in addition to the lack of labor and the force of tradition that kept the planter using slave rather than wage labor, even after European immigration began to deposit a surplus working population in the states. The growing of cotton, rice, tobacco, and sugar, the staples produced by slave labor, was carried on as a large-scale agricultural enterprise, involving heavy investments of capital, extensive tracts of land, and large gangs of laborers. The extensive agriculture of the past inevitably presupposed or gave birth to class divisions. Slave-owners and slaves, feudal lords and serfs, capitalist growers and wage-earners are productive relations common to such large-scale agriculture.

Small-scale agriculture on the other hand does not necessarily involve sharp social differences between the individuals engaged in production. This could be seen in any section of the country populated by small farmers who cultivated their own land. The farmer and his family usually performed all the necessary labor. For the extra labor needed at certain seasons and on special occasions, he would either call upon his friends and neighbors or else draw upon the hired hands floating around the vicinity. Propertyless workers who hired themselves out for wages by the day, week, month or year quickly appeared in all settled farming communities, later

constituting a shifting stream of labor which flowed back and forth between the town and country.

On the frontiers there were no sizeable permanent bodies of employers and employees so long as any able-bodied person could easily possess enough land to become a farmer on his own account. Nor in most farming sections were there any hard and fast distinctions between the farmers and hired hands. As a rule, they worked side by side in the fields; ate at the same table; lived in the same house; and regarded each other as social equals. The hands were "help," not slaves. Manual labor, which was looked upon as degrading by the slaveholder, was regarded as the most worthy of occupations by the freehold farmer. Before the rise of the industrial workers, this sturdy class of plebeian citizens formed the backbone of the democratic forces in the United States.

Free labor differs from slave labor in two essential respects. In the first place the free laborer has the right to sell his own labor power upon the market. His person is his own property. In the second place, he sells his labor power only for a definite, limited period.

The chattel slave, on the other hand, cannot sell himself for he belongs to another. He is bought and sold in the market like any other kind of merchandise and not only he but his offspring belong to the owner for life. From the standpoint of the laborer, it makes all the difference in the world whether he is enslaved or free. But the capitalist is indifferent to the form of labor he employs. His aim is to obtain the maximum amount of profit from his labor. So long as slave labor can produce more surplus than other forms of labor, well and good. When it cannot, the planter-capitalist will turn to a different system of labor in which the prospects of profit seem surer. It is all one with him.

When slaves became an economic liability to the Virginia planters, they were disposed to grant them formal freedom. On the cotton plantations of the South today most planting corporations have changed over from the semi-servile system of sharecropping which succeeded chattel slavery to day-labor because the latter is more profitable under present mechanized conditions of production.

Chattel slavery, therefore, remained the prevailing form of plantation labor under the regime of King Cotton because the proprietors found that it was more profitable to invest their capital in black slaves, provide them with the necessary means of production and subsistence, and consume their capacities for labor during their active life than to use wage labor or to adopt the sharecropping system. In extenuation of slavery, blunt John Adams declared to the Continental Congress: "It is of no consequence by what name you call your people, whether by that of freeman or slave. In some countries the laboring poor men are called freemen, in others they are called slaves, but the difference is imaginary only. What matters it whether a landlord employing ten laborers on his farm gives them annually as much as will buy the necessaries of life or give them these necessaries at short hand?"

It mattered in one extremely important respect to the

Southern planter. So long as his labor could be steadily at work on the plantations the year round, it was cheaper to keep slaves than to use hired labor. From this standpoint cotton was an ideal crop for the slaveowner. With the exception of sugar cane, no other crop afforded such constant employment for unskilled labor. Plowing, planting, weeding, picking, ginning followed one another in regular sequence from one year's end to the next. There was no season when the experienced and capable planter could not find some productive work for his slaves on a cotton plantation.

The planters had other reasons for keeping the yoke of chattel slavery firmly fastened upon the blacks' shoulders. They feared that the emancipated black would join the procession of immigrants to the frontier and leave them without an adequate supply of labor. Many Northern manufacturers who shared the same fear with respect to their own wage slaves not only opposed the opening of the Western territories to emigration but attempted to impose legal restrictions upon such mobility to keep a plentiful supply of cheap labor at their command.

In a powerful polemic against the abolitionists in 1837 Chancellor Harper of South Carolina summed up the economic arguments of the planters for slavery. "The first and most obvious effect (of emancipation)," he argued, "would be to put an end to the cultivation of the one great southern staple. And this would be equally the result if we suppose the emancipated Negroes to be in no way distinguished from the free laborers of other countries, and that their labor would be equally effective. In that case, they would soon cease to be laborers for hire, but would scatter themselves over our unbounded territory to become independent landowners themselves.

"The cultivation of the soil on an extensive scale can only be carried on where there are slaves, or in countries superabounding in free labor. No such operations are carried on in any portion of our country where there are not slaves. Such are carried on in England, where there is an overflowing population, and an intense competition for employment...Here, about the same quantity of laborers is required at every season, and the planter suffers no inconvenience from retaining his laborers throughout the year."

Free white labor might be more productive but it was less reliable than slave labor. "Imagine," the Chancellor goes on to remark, "an extensive rice and cotton plantation cultivated by free laborers, who might perhaps strike for an increase in wages, at a season when the neglect of a few days would insure the destruction of the whole crop; even if it were possible to procure laborers at all, what planter would venture to carry on his operations under such circumstances?"--Memoir on Slavery, pp.4-5.

Well might the corporation-farmer and shipper-growers of California, Colorado, Ohio and New Jersey who today have so much difficulty in suppressing untimely strikes by their workers, envy their predecessors and sigh for the days of chattel slavery when strikes were forbidden under penalty of death!

That the possibility of strikes was a factor in militating against the use of wage labor is confirmed by the following incident

recounted by Charles Lyell, the famous geologist, from a conversation with "an intelligent Louisianian" in 1846. "The sugar and cotton crop is easily lost, if not taken in at once when ripe; the canes being damaged by a slight frost, and the cotton requiring to be picked dry as soon as mature, and being ruined by rain. Very lately a planter, five miles below New Orleans, having resolved to dispense with slave labor, hired one hundred Irish and German immigrants at very high wages. In the middle of the harvest they all struck for double pay. No others were to be had, and it was impossible to purchase slaves in a few days. In that short time he lost produce to the value of ten thousand dollars." -- Second Visit to the United States, by Charles Lyell, Vol. II, p. 126. (Quoted from The Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. II, p. 183).

"I need hardly say," Chancellor Harper concludes, "that these staples cannot be produced to any extent where the proprietor of the soil cultivates it with his own hands. He can do little more than produce the necessary food for himself and his family." (De Bow's Review, Vol. X, 47, Jan. 1851, p. 588). Slaves were indispensable for the creation of that surplus product which enriched the slave owners.

Slavery was an absolute necessity in the frontier regions where few white men would work for others when they could so easily manage to get a living by themselves. The reason for this was well formulated by the anonymous author of two articles on "Slave-Labor and the Conditions of Its Extinction" in the English Economist for October 10-17th, 1857. "Compulsory labor has one salient advantage and one only -- that the capitalist can collect, group, and organize it at pleasure even in the centre of the most thinly populated district, and far from any labor market. It thus supplies to the American planter, directly and easily, the solution of the question which so puzzles our theorists on colonization -- how to bring labor in a new country into sufficient dependence on capital... 'Buy your labor,' they say, 'not from the laborer himself, but from the owner of the laborer,' and then for a fixed sum you can organize it, even in the depths of the wilderness, much as you please. And this is one economical advantage of slavery, that it carries a large-scale system of cultivation out of reach of labor markets, and enables you to cultivate large areas of the richest land, and to get the largest net profits out of it, without reference to any condition but that of easy and cheap transport for the products."

If, therefore, slavery had been brought into being because of a lack of labor in the colonies, it persisted and was reinforced because of the necessities of large-scale agriculture. Just as free labor was found in practice to be the form of labor necessary for large-scale industry and small scale agriculture, so slave labor was found to be the form of labor best adapted to large-scale commercial agriculture in the Americas before the invention of modern agricultural machinery.

The Expansion of the Cotton Empire

Owing to the restricted area within which tobacco, rice, and sugar could be raised and the comparatively limited markets for these crops, the Southern plantations had grown rather slowly

before the 19th century. With the coming of King Cotton the plantation system entered upon an era of rapid expansion. The rich calcareous loam so suitable to cotton cultivation girdled the foothills of the Appalachians all the way from Virginia to the states along the Gulf and thence west across the Mississippi bottom lands into Eastern Texas. This enormous "black belt," combined with the apparently indefinite elasticity of the market, freed the cotton planters from the narrow boundaries that hemmed in their predecessors and gave a steady impetus to the extension of the Cotton Kingdom.

The rapid exhaustion of the soil, thanks to the improvident methods of cultivation pursued by the slaveowners, was one of the chief centrifugal forces in the outward drive of the plantation system. In their eagerness to extract the last penny of profit as quickly as possible from their agricultural operations, the plantation owners exhausted the natural powers of their land as recklessly as some among them exhausted the energies of their slaves. By failing to diversify their crops or provide for proper drainage, they robbed the soil of its fertility and allowed it to deteriorate, undermining the natural foundations of their own wealth. The resultant impoverishment of the land compelled the planter either to clear new lands adjoining his own and thus add more acreage to his estate or else to change location and move southwestward in search of cheap virgin soil.

Pillage of the land was a characteristic feature of the commercial plantation system in all stages of its development. The tobacco planters had plundered the soil no less prodigally than did the cotton growers. A graphic description of the decay of an entire region in Virginia from this cause is given by an intelligent black observer named Charles Ball who was one of a band of slaves driven through the region by a slave trader in 1805. "It had originally been highly fertile and productive, and had it been properly treated, would doubtless have continued to yield abundant and prolific crops; but the gentlemen who became the early proprietors of this fine region, supplied themselves with slaves from Africa, cleared large plantations of many thousands of acres -- cultivated tobacco -- and became suddenly wealthy, built spacious homes and numerous churches...but regardless of their true interest, they valued their lands less than their slaves; exhausted the kindly soil, by unremitting crops of tobacco, declined in their circumstances and finally grew poor upon the very fields that had formerly made their possessors rich; abandoned one portion after another, as not worth planting any longer; and, pinched by necessity at last sold their slaves to Georgian planters, to procure a subsistence; and when all was gone, took refuge in the wilds of Kentucky; again to act the same melancholy drama; leaving their native land to desolation and poverty." Narrative of the Life & Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man. (Quoted from The Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. II, p.62)

In the course of two and a half centuries similar cycles were enacted in the sugar islands of the West Indies. An island, thrown open for settlement, would at first be inhabited by free proprietors, cultivating their own land. A period of general

prosperity and rough equality would prevail among the white colonists. Gradually, however, as production came to be concentrated in estates of larger and larger size, gangs of slaves would crowd out the small farmers. In a short time the rapacious planters would begin to exhaust the soil. With the diminishing fertility of the land and the increasing expensiveness of slave labor, the costs of production would rise. At this stage the supply of products from the new islands, occupied by immigrants from the old, would be thrown upon the market, and the competition would bring slow ruin to the old planters.

"Thus the Windward Islands first supplied almost all the then limited consumption of sugar and coffee in Europe; Jamaica rose on their decay, and went through precisely the same stages of existence; San Domingo in turn greatly eclipsed Jamaica, but was overwhelmed by the great Negro insurrection, and never reached the period of decline. Lastly the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Porto Rico, after centuries of comparative neglect, started all at once to the front rank of the exporting islands, while the British planters with the aid of their accumulated capital, were struggling against encroaching decay." -- (Quoted from Introduction by Ulrich Phillips, Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. I, p. 92)

The plantation system of the Cotton Kingdom ran through the same process of development on a grander scale and at a more rapid rate. As the land in the old plantation regions deteriorated and the call for cotton increased in the early decades of the century, the cotton planters pushed their way in successive waves of immigration from the seaboard states into the rich alluvial lands of Alabama and Mississippi, driving the small farmers, hunters, trappers and Indians before them, trampling them underfoot or thrusting them aside into the piedmont or onto the sandy soils unfit for cotton. Jefferson's purchase of Louisiana placed at the planters' disposal an extraordinarily fertile and extensive area, already dedicated to slavery. Quickly taking possession of the lower part of the Louisiana Territory and expelling the Indian tribes beyond the Red River, the slaveholders soon overflowed into the neighboring state of Texas, then under Mexico's jurisdiction.

Although slavery was legally forbidden in Mexico, the planters evaded this prohibition by special exemptions and contracts binding blacks to serve 99 year apprenticeships. This was, however, not enough. The planters then conspired, like the Hawaiian sugar growers fifty years later, to rebel against the established government; set up an independent Republic of their own; and agitated for its annexation to the United States. The Mexican War of 1845 set a seal upon the incorporation of Texas into the Union, just as the Spanish War of 1898 led to the annexation of Hawaii.

The center of the Cotton Kingdom kept shifting southwestward, the proportion of slaves to the white population decreasing in the border states while it increased in the states farther south. In 1821 two-thirds of the cotton crop was raised on the Atlantic seaboard. With the westward trek of cotton culture the proportion was reversed. Pioneering South Carolina produced 28% of the total crop in 1821, 15% in 1834, 12% in 1850, and only 6.6% in 1860. In that year 77.5% of the staple was produced west of the Appalachians; the plantations of Texas and Arkansas then accounted for

larger crops than the state which had begun the cultivation of cotton seventy years before.

Cotton is King!

The Cotton Kingdom reached the peak of its power and glory around the middle of the 19th century. In 1850 the cotton country covered about 400,000 square miles, stretching from South Carolina on the east to San Antonio, Texas on the west. It extended in breadth from 200 miles at its extremities in the Carolinas and Texas to six or seven hundred miles in its center in the Mississippi Valley. The rich virgin soil in this territory produced abundant crops of the most various kinds with a relatively small expenditure of labor. It was cross-hatched by many navigable rivers that made transportation and communication easy and inexpensive for the planters.

The cotton planters were the economic, political and social potentates of the American nation. Cotton was the most important crop not only in the South but in the national economy, constituting over one-half of the total exports for the U.S. in 1850. The entire economy of the Southern states was adapted and subordinated to the needs of the cotton cultivators. The development of the non-cotton raising regions was sacrificed to the nobles of the Cotton Kingdom. The cotton country consumed most of the produce of the slave-breeders and tobacco-planters, the whiskey distillers, corn and rye growers of Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina, the cattle-raisers, the pork-packers, mule and horse owners and drovers from Kentucky, Tennessee and the Northwest and especially the grain-growers of the Northwestern states.

A good portion of the commerce, manufacturing, and banking of the North depended upon the Cotton Kingdom. The merchants and shippers of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, the mill-owners and textile workers of New England, the financial houses of the North subsisted upon one or another branch of the cotton trade. Thousands of individuals who took no direct part in cotton production had money invested or derived revenues from the slave system or some collateral branch of it.

The cotton nobility came to form the First Order in the Federal Government and its armed forces. They controlled the President, and Cabinet, both houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, the foreign service, and dictated the major policies made in Washington. The social prestige and influence of the slaveowners were enhanced by intermarriage between the leading families of the North and South, just as their political power was multiplied and fortified by the alliance between the Southern and Northern wings of the Democratic Party.

Since Southern cotton was the foremost staple of international commerce and the basis of England's great textile industry, the spokesmen for the cotton magnates came to view the whole of industrial civilization as revolving around their peculiar system of labor and dependent upon its produce for their existence and prosperity. Monarchs of all they surveyed in the South, sovereign in the U.S., and principal producers for world trade, it was small

wonder that the ardent fuglemen of the slaveholders exclaimed: "Cotton is King!"

Confidence in the prospects of their peculiar system was greatly enhanced at a most critical juncture by their ability to withstand the impact of the depression of 1857, the most severe economic crisis of the 19th century.

Thanks to its narrow agricultural basis the Cotton Kingdom escaped the full fury of the blast. The steady demand for cotton in the world market buoyed up the South while falling prices for almost all other commodities dragged down the rest of the country.

At the same time the South was too closely connected with the national economy not to suffer from the effects of the crisis. The planters felt the panic in the contraction of credit which caused the failure of several important Southern banks and the suspension of others, making it difficult for them to secure their usual financial accommodations and forcing them to throw quantities of cotton onto the market in order to meet their obligations. This enforced liquidation depressed both the price of cotton and the spirits of the planters. Such a reminder of their dependence upon Northern capital further enraged the cotton growers and threw fresh fuel upon the fires of secession sentiment.

This was only a minor irritant, however, compared to the losses sustained by the Yankees. In general, the slaveholders congratulated themselves on their good fortune. Just as they were accustomed to boast of the superior safety of slave over free labor, so now they exulted in the superior stability of their agricultural society over the industrial North.

The Maturing Crisis in the Chattel Slave System

At first glance it would seem that the southerners had ample reason for their self-satisfaction. The production of cotton had doubled during the 1850s and reached a record of five million bales in 1860. Despite a drop to eight cents in 1851-1852, the average price per pound for the decade was between ten and eleven cents, a level of profitable production.

But this superficial appearance of prosperity during the fifties in the South was as deceptive as the hectic flush on the cheeks of the consumptive. At bottom, all was far from well within the Cotton Kingdom. The slaveholders were pounding a weakening chest. The slave system was the victim of a wasting and incurable disease that was ravaging it from within at the same time that its rivals were endeavoring to choke it from without.

The germs of this disease were latent in the very constitution of the slave system and had bred periodic disorders within it. In order to understand the nature of this disease and the reasons why it acquired a malignant form toward the end of the fifties, it will be necessary to expose the roots of the slave economy and the laws that governed its growth.

It has been previously pointed out that while the slave

economy retained its antique form, it had acquired a highly bourgeoisified character through its affiliations with industrial capitalism. As a subordinate part of world capitalism, the slave economy suffered from all the evils of that system, shared its vicissitudes, and added its civilized vices of calculated overwork and uncalculated over-production to its own.

The primary condition for the growth and well-being of the Cotton Kingdom was the continual extension of its market. Here the South suffered not only from the backwardness of its own system of production but from the anarchy of world economy. Any slackening in the cotton industry had immediate repercussions in the economic life of the South, which was wholly at the mercy of the cotton market. On this score, however, the big planters had small reason for complaint. Cotton consumption continued to soar steadily until the Civil War, despite the periodic interruption of overproduction crises. The cotton crop doubled with every decade from 1800 to 1840 and trebled from 1840 to 1860. Five million bales were produced and sold in 1859-1860 compared to one million bales in 1830-1831.

The main causes of the impending crisis in the South were, therefore, not to be found outside the Cotton Kingdom but inside of it. For, in addition to the evils contracted from its association with industrial capitalism, the slave system was subject to far more serious maladies which grew out of the contradictions inherent in its own method of production. What was the nature of these contradictions and how did they affect the development of Southern society?

The cultivation of the staple crops produced by slave labor was mainly carried on as large-scale agricultural operations, requiring heavy investments of capital, extensive tracts of rich soil, and large gangs of unskilled labor. Each of these three fundamental factors in the slave economy, capital, land and labor, possessed an intrinsically contradictory character. These contradictions constituted the motive forces that drove the slave system forward at the same time that they imposed limitations upon its growth. The antagonism between these productive forces and the social relations that encased them gave birth to chronic troubles within the Cotton Kingdom. Little as many of its inhabitants suspected their presence, the constant pressure exerted by the actions and counteractions of these antagonistic forces upon Southern society was as much a part of their environment as the pressure of the atmosphere.

Once the Southern plantations had been transformed into enterprises in which the sole aim of operation was to produce profit for the entrepreneur, they came under the sway of capitalist development. The fundamental law of capitalist development consists in the fact that constant capital grows more rapidly than variable capital. That is to say, an ever greater portion of the newly created capitals, which are incessantly accumulated under the conditions of capitalist production, are applied to those branches of social economy which produce the means of production. This tendency of the constant component of capital to increase faster and at the relative expense of the variable component of capital lies at the roots of the rapid expansion of capitalist industry, its periodic crises, its decline, and will be, in the final analysis,

the basic objective economic cause of its inevitable destruction,

Southern slave economy came to be governed by this same law but in a form peculiar to its own method of production. The principal difference between chattel slavery and wage labor lies in the fact that the slave does not sell his capacity to work piece-meal as a commodity to the capitalist but is the property of the slaveowner. The slaves who provided the labor power for the cultivation of cotton, sugar, tobacco or rice belonged among the instruments of production along with horses and mules.

From this difference there resulted an entirely different division of capital under the two systems of labor. Under the wage labor system the constant capital employed in the process of production is embodied exclusively in objective means of production; land, buildings, raw materials, fuel, machinery, etc.; the variable capital, which from the capitalist standpoint is alone productive since it is the source of the surplus value from which profit is derived, is that part invested in living labor power and paid to the workers in the form of wages.

The situation is quite otherwise in respect to slave labor. Here the capital invested by the planter was, like the capital put into land, an element of his fixed, rather than his circulating capital. It was as fixed as the industrialist's investment in factory buildings and machinery. In order to exploit his slaves and receive adequate revenue from his capital investments, the planter had to lay out additional capital for their maintenance and management. The planters' expenditures for the means of subsistence and the wages of superintendence constituted the more variable portion of his capital.

Competition was no less important a motive force of production within the Cotton Kingdom as outside it. Under the spur of competition the planter was driven, like the cotton manufacturer, to extend his scale of operations. This entailed the investment of ever larger sums of money in slaves and land, the principal means of production, just as the manufacturer was forced to install more and better machinery in textile mills to produce more cheaply and steal a march upon his competitors. Thus the fixed capital of the planters tended to grow faster than the rest of their capital and to form a constantly greater portion of their total wealth.

The agricultural users of slave labor were under far more intense pressure than the industrial employers of free labor to extend the scale of their operations. The factory owner could sweat more surplus value out of his hands either by prolonging the working day or by increasing the intensity of their labor. The peculiar conditions of forced labor prevented the slaveholders from doing this to any great degree. The ordinary field hands would not fulfill more than the daily task allotted them by custom; they could not be driven beyond a certain fixed point without passive but no less effective resistance on their part. Indeed, it required the unceasing vigilance of the taskmaster and slave driver combined with the severest forms of punishment and cruelest means of torture to ensure the slaves' completion of their stint.

The slaves were not only unwilling but uneducated workers.

The technique of labor upon the plantations could not be improved except within the narrowest limits owing to the enforced ignorance of the bondsmen and their carelessness in the handling of draft animals and implements. The planters had no other way of acquiring greater profits from their operations than through the amplification of their units of production.

The unremitting pressure upon the planters to reconvert their surplus capital into additional means of production in order to extend their scale of operations as cotton prices tended to fall gave rise to a chronic internal crisis within the Cotton Kingdom which constituted its progressive force, until it threatened to become fatal. It was a common saying in the South that the slaveowner grew more cotton to get more money to buy more slaves to raise more cotton, and so on, in a never-ending spiral.

This nemesis that harried the planter arose from the very nature of his productive system. He could not escape it so long as he remained wedded to chattel slavery as an appendix to capitalist industrialism.

It was precisely during the periods of greatest prosperity for the planters that this process of the transformation of surplus capital into fixed capital, that is into slaves and land, took place at the fastest rate and on the greatest scale. This had important economic consequences. The general increase in the productivity of labor resulting from the continual extension of production led to overproduction crises, which from time to time depressed the prices of cotton below the level of profitable cultivation, especially in the older cotton-growing regions. The opening of new lands to cultivation in the Southwest at the end of the twenties, for example, caused considerable distress among the South Carolina and Georgia cotton-raisers.

Another consequence of the remorseless extension of production was the tendency of the planter to fall into debt. At the beginning of each crop year the average planter found himself with little liquid capital on hand. In order to maintain his family and carry on production until the shipping and sale of his next crop, he had to borrow money. He was in an even more difficult predicament if he borrowed money to buy more slaves and land. In both cases, "the poor toad under the harrow yclept the planter" fell into the clutches of the merchants, the bankers, the factors or the slave-traders who advanced him credit.

Moreover, the rich planters like other agricultural aristocrats of baronial stature were notoriously improvident and extravagant in the management of their affairs. Many left the task of supervising their estates to hired overseers or managers while they disported with their families in the Southern cities, Europe or northern watering places. As they sank deeper and deeper into debt, they again extended their operations with similar results. The only end to this vicious circle was bankruptcy and ruin.

Along with this expansion in the area of production the means of production became concentrated in fewer hands. The big planters, able to command the capital and credit required by large-scale production and satisfied with a lower rate of return, bought

or chased out the smaller farmers who had originally cleared the land and reduced it to cultivation. The petty producers, ground to dust by competitive struggle, were trampled underfoot, pushed aside onto poorer soils, or else driven forward into the unsettled territories toward the West.

This phenomenon, observable in all stages and centers of the slave economy, reached its peak in the South in the decade preceding the Civil War. In Alabama in 1850 "the great mass of the slaves belonged to a comparatively small number of men. As a matter of fact, less than 30,000 persons, that is to say less than seven percent of the white population of Alabama, owned the 335,000 slaves in the state. The average holding of slaves was therefore between eleven and twelve. Three-fourths of all slaves were owned by less than 10,000 men. The land holdings of these men were in proportion to their holdings of slaves. Their plantations frequently included thousands of acres, and from the big plantations came the bulk of the cotton crop."--The Lower South in American History, by William Garrett Brown, p. 34.

The census of 1860 put the white population of the slave states at 8,099,760 and the slave at 3,953,580. The slaves were owned by only 384,000 whites, of whom 107,957 owned more than ten; 10,781 owned fifty or more; and 1,733 owned 100 or more. More than two-thirds of the white population had no direct interest in slavery and but a small segment of the remainder gained much wealth from the system.

The concentration of wealth, as revealed by ownership of slaves, was confirmed by statistics of the annual incomes of the uppermost crust. Around 1850, says Dodd, a thousand families received fifty millions a year, while the remaining 666,000 families received only about sixty millions, "a concentration of wealth and income hardly surpassed in the most advanced stage of an industrialized society." Together with this monopoly of the means of production and this concentration of wealth went a monopoly of social prestige and political authority in the hands of the rich slaveholders.

Owing to its superficial, rapacious, and improvident methods of cultivation, the slave plantation system required a steady supply of new, cheap, and fertile semi-tropical soil. In their triumphant progress the cotton planters laid waste the land like the invading army. "Even in Texas, before it had been ten years under cotton cultivation," reported Olmsted, "the spectacle that was so familiar in the older slave states was frequently seen by the traveler -- an abandoned plantation of 'worn-out' fields with its little village of dwellings, now a home only for wolves and vultures."

The planters began to fear that cotton culture would shortly reach its natural limits. They could no more abide such a prospect with equanimity than a healthy person can face old age and death. The immediate economic consequence of this fact was an enhancement in the value of good cotton fields in the settlements. This still further increased the cotton growers' costs of production.

By making the acquisition of new property and the retention of the old increasingly difficult for the poorer cultivators, it also accelerated the tendency toward the accumulation of the land in the hands of the wealthier planter-capitalists and intensified the pressure from the middle ranks of Southern society for the seizure of fresh territories.

A convergence of economic factors, the deterioration of the land, the ousting of the smaller cultivators, the necessity for keeping capital and slaves at work, urged the Southerners forward. Strenuous but ineffective efforts were made to carry cotton culture into Missouri, Kansas, and other states where natural conditions were less favorable than in the Southern regions.

Hemmed in on the north and to the west, the planters could proceed in only one direction -- toward the tropics. "The Conquering Republic" had broken through its territorial limits in the past by means of an aggressive foreign policy. Accordingly, even before they had digested the domains taken from Mexico at the end of the forties, the land-hungry slaveholders sought to stretch the boundaries of their slave empire. But their efforts to procure fresh fields were to prove far less successful in the fifties than in the forties.

A third source of difficulty for the slave system was contributed by its special form of labor. While factory operators in the North found a virtually inexhaustible reservoir of labor in emigration from Europe, the plantation owners had access to no such ample external source of supply. The importation of slaves had been forbidden since 1808 and, although smuggling continued, it was costly, dangerous, and added only a few thousand raw hands a year compared to the tens and hundreds of thousands of free white immigrants.

The slaveholders, therefore, had to rely upon the natural increase in the number of the slave population for their additional labor. Black women were urged or forced into becoming "prolific breeders." Howell Cobb's overseer informed him that his Negroes increased "like rabbits." It was common for the slave population on a plantation to double in less than a dozen years. Part of the profits of the big slaveowners was derived from this propagation, just as part of the middle Western farmer's profit came from the increase in the value of land. "Unearned increment" has been a most important part of the crop in all stages of the expansion of American agriculture.

The suppression of the African slave trade gave a hothouse growth to the practice of raising slaves for the market. This vile profession was the ripe fruit of the slave plantation system in the Cotton Kingdom. In other countries and in less civilized ages the custom of breeding beings for sale was rare or unknown. Slaves were obtained either by conquest or by the importation of captives previously enslaved by others.

The older plantation aristocracy introduced a crowning refinement into the Southern slave system. The Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and Kentucky plantations, which had become ill-adapted to cotton cultivation, were turned into stock farms for raising blacks for sale to the cotton planters farther south. The breeding

of "cotton niggers" was a far more lucrative business for decadent and impoverished slave holders than the breeding of oxen, horses and mules. At a time when horses were selling at a hundred dollars each, prime field hands brought from one to two thousand dollars on the auction block; young blacks were estimated to be worth ten cents a pound; and every new-born child added a hundred dollars to his owner's wealth.

Where human beings were placed in the same category as stock animals, it is hardly necessary to dwell upon the consequences. The most revolting practices outlawed by civilized society became an accepted and sanctified part of the social system in the South. Where the slave-owner had a direct monetary interest in promoting the number of births among his slaves, whatever means administered to that result met with his acquiescence. Promiscuity and prostitution were at a premium while female slaves were publicly advertised as excellent breeders and fetched higher prices on that account.

Every decent sentiment and human relation was violated by the slave traffic. Married couples were sold separately by their owners and forced to take new mates in order to augment the slave-holder's wealth. Children were sold to strangers who carried them hundreds of miles from their homes and parents into Carolina swamps or the wild regions of the frontier. Is it any wonder that slaves sought to escape, revolted periodically, and fears of their uprising haunted and tormented their possessors?

The most sinister figures in this bestial business were the slave-traders who moved between the slave breeder and cotton planter. Although little attention has been paid to their activities, these dealers in human beings were powerful personages in the life of the South. The trader in blacks held the fate of many a planter in his hand. He was the best customer of the black-raising planter and his last resort in time of need. He was also often the master of those cultivators who bought slaves from him on credit.

The economic influence and social situation of the slave-holders made them important figures in state and national politics. They constituted the nucleus of the rabid pro-slavery faction in the Democratic Party, which nominated Polk for president in 1844 and pledged that party to Texas in order to open that territory for slavery. They were powers in the Pierce administration.

Even though the slaves multiplied fast, the supply kept falling short of the demand, especially during the boom periods. The growing demand for cotton combined with the restriction upon the foreign slave trade kept forcing up the price of slaves. A prime field-hand, which in 1808 was worth \$150, cost between two to three thousand dollars in the boom years just before the Civil War.

The irrepressible tendency of the price of slaves to rise under this economic pressure was aggravated by the fact that slaves were the main repositories for investment and speculation in the South. "The universal disposition is to purchase," remarked the South's foremost economist, J. B. DeBow, in January 1861. "It is the first use for savings, and the Negro purchased is the last possession parted with."

The slave mart occupied the same place in Southern economy as the stock market under contemporary capitalism. Southern moneyed gentry invested their surplus funds in slaves as the modern investor puts them into stocks and bonds. The speculation in slaves tended to force up the price of slave property artificially, augmenting the costs of production for the planters.

This tendency reached its peak in 1859-1860. Despite the warning of conservative Southerners, men plunged into speculation far beyond their depths. "Men are borrowing money at exorbitant prices...the old rule of pricing a negro by the price of cotton per pound...does not seem to be regarded. Negroes are 25 percent higher now with cotton at ten and a half cents than they were two or three years ago, when it was worth fifteen and sixteen cents. Men are demented on the subject. A reverse will surely come," warned the Milledgeville, Georgia, Federal Union of January 17, 1860. In fact, the speculative bubble had approached its limit when the war cut across the maturing crisis.

The planters were persistently plagued by the inefficiency of slave labor and its extremely primitive technological level. In a detailed analysis of the Southern system one of the editors of the Southern Cultivator frankly admitted that "the amount of labor used on an ordinary Southern plantation is greater per productive acre than the amount of labor used in the most perfectly cultivated portions of Europe." Olmsted calculated that the average day-laborer in the North did from three to four times as much work in the field per day than the slave hand. Indeed, chattel slavery was the most expensive form of labor in the world.

It was also among the most backward. The one "modern" agricultural implement in use on the average cotton plantation was the plow. The value of the farm tools upon the standard plantation of one thousand acres and one hundred slaves was well under five hundred dollars. This was half the cost of a single field hand. The conditions of forced labor kept the plantation system tied down to this low technological level.

While all these economic factors harassed the individual planters singly, they found collective expression in the constantly rising costs of production. The cotton growers suffered from competition amongst themselves on the one hand and from the monopolies of the Northern capitalists on the other. Their position as producers was quite different from their situation as consumers. They had to sell their products upon an open market ruled by free competition while they had to buy commodities upon a protected national market controlled by slavebreeders, manufacturers, merchants, railroad and shipping owners.

The plight of the poorer and less efficient planters in this respect was worsened rather than lightened during boom periods. Despite fair prices for cotton, the rising costs of production made it harder for them to derive an annual profit from their operations. Ominous signs of decay lurked behind the increased prices of land and slaves.

The accumulated wealth incorporated in slaves and land was

distributed in an extremely one-sided manner. The upper tier of the planting class was being enriched by this doubling of Southern wealth; the lower orders were being impoverished by it. The principal means of production were being placed beyond the reach of the lesser cotton-grower at the same time that the prices of the things they had to purchase became more expensive. Slaves, land, superintendent's wages, clothes, food, mules, manufactures, freights, commissions, interest and other essential items of production were rising in price faster than the price of cotton. The cotton cultivators were caught in a steadily tightening vise and the poorer the planter, the tighter the squeeze.

How to get more land, cheaper slaves, cheaper means of subsistence in general, how to lower the costs of production and thereby arrest the falling rate of profit; these were the prime economic problems that obsessed the cotton cultivators.

The system of chattel slavery in the South had entered the same stage of development as the system of wage labor was later to undergo in the United States. After a prolonged period of widespread prosperity, the planters entered upon a period of prosperity for the fortunate few and impoverishment for the many. This was true not only for the whole of Southern society but also for its upper classes. Competitive slavery was giving birth to a monopolist slavery in which the great bulk of the means of production and wealth were gathered into the hands of the plantation magnates, the Hairstons, Cobbs, Aikens and Davises. "The 60 Families" who rule contemporary America had their predecessors in these seigneurs of the slaveholding South, who held most of the slaves, the best land, received three-fourths of the returns on export trade, and enjoyed a monopoly of political power, social prestige and the good things of life.

The oppression and exploitation emanating from this small ruling group weighed upon the rest of Southern society, intensifying their restlessness and discontent. It found expression in loud demands for expansionism from the less favored planters, in burning resentment among poorer whites and small farmers, and in more runaways and incipient revolts among the millions of black slaves. This growing volume of dissidence beneath them reacted in turn upon the ruling group, propelling them toward a radical solution of their problems.

The crisis developing in the slave states was therefore more serious than the passing crisis that ravaged the free states in 1857-58. The latter, although acute, originated in an infantile disease that was soon thrown off and from which the North emerged healthier and stronger than ever.

The impending crisis in the South, however, was a crisis of decay, not of growth. It was an expression of the deepest contradictions within the slave states. While the wage labor system was still in the prime of youth both on a national and world scale, Southern chattel slavery was sick and approaching its death agony. One was in the ascendant, the other in decline, and no power on earth could prevent the former from expansion or save the latter from eventual extinction.

Efforts to Overcome the Crisis

The planters did not remain passive in the face of these problems. They were in the main an enterprising breed of men accustomed to conquer the obstacles in their line of march. In the years immediately preceding the Civil War they set about to remedy their economic weaknesses, bolster up the foundations of the slave system, and prevent the internal crisis from deepening. If they did not solve the problems that beset them, the cause of their failure lay not in their lack of energy but in economic conditions and political forces which proved in the end to be mightier than their own resources.

The cotton cultivators combatted the mounting costs of production in accordance with the means at their command. The richer planters extended their properties, seeking to offset decreasing profit by augmenting its mass. Large plantations, which could be operated more efficiently and produce more cheaply, became the rule throughout the Cotton Kingdom. This trend toward concentration, which took place at a faster rate in the newer cotton states than in the old, acquired a furious momentum during the fifties.

The inevitable results of this process were pictured by Cassius C. Clay, Jr. in DeBow's Review for December 1855. "I can show you, with sorrow, in the older portions of Alabama, and in my native county of Madison, the sad memorials of the artless and exhausting culture of cotton. Our small planters, after taking the cream off their lands, unable to restore them by rest, manures, or otherwise, are going further west and south, in search of other virgin lands, which they may and will despoil and impoverish in like manner. Our wealthier planters, with greater means and no more skill, are buying out their poorer neighbors, extending their plantations, and adding to their slave force. The wealthy few, who are able to live on smaller profits, and to give their blasted fields some rest, are thus pushing off the many, who are merely independent.

"Of the twenty millions of dollars annually realized from the sales of the cotton crop of Alabama, nearly all not expended in supporting the producers is reinvested in land and Negroes. Thus the white population had decreased, and the slave increased, almost pari passu in several counties of our state. In 1825, Madison county cast about 3000 votes; now she cannot cast exceeding 2300. In traversing that county one will discover numerous farm-houses, once the abode of industrious and intelligent free-men, now occupied by slaves, or tenantless, deserted, and dilapidated, he will observe fields, once fertile, now unfenced, abandoned, and covered with those evil harbingers -- fox-tail and broom-sedge; and he will find 'one only master grasps the whole domain' that once furnished happy homes for a dozen white families. Indeed, a country in its infancy, where fifty years ago scarce a forest tree had been felled by the axe of the pioneer, is already exhibiting the painful signs of senility and decay apparent in Virginia and the Carolinas; the freshness of its agricultural glory is gone; the vigor of its youth is extinct; and the spirit of desolation see a brooding over it."

Signs of decadence similar to these in the very heart of the cotton belt could be observed in a more or less advanced stage throughout the entire South.

While the slave system promoted the growth of large estates, at the same time it set limits to the size of individual plantations. Slave labor, being unwilling labor, required the closest supervision. Moreover, the slaves, possessing but one means of transportation, their two legs, had to be able to walk to and from the fields without too much loss of time. The optimum size for the most profitable working of a plantation was found to be an estate of about two thousand acres. It was better to multiply the units of production than to increase their area indefinitely. Accordingly, the wealthiest planters owned and operated several plantations, often widely separated from each other. The Hairston family, for example, which held seventeen hundred slaves, had plantations in Virginia, Alabama and Mississippi. This diffusion of their properties through the South freed these magnates from local and state prejudices and enabled them to formulate a pan-Southern policy and set up a Confederacy in conformity with their interests.

The big planters built up their estates at the expense of the small proprietors who were submitted to degradation in the social scale. A process of polarization was at work among the cotton growers. While the main mass of the means of production and wealth were falling into the hands of the gentry, petty producers were being crushed in the competitive struggle, forced to sell out, and remove themselves and their remaining possessions to the frontier for a fresh start.

The swift concentration of wealth in the hands of an ever-diminishing number of planter-plutocrats resulted in a more rigid stratification of Southern society. The formerly fluid frontier settlements began to set into fixed castes. It became harder for a poor white to become a substantial small farmer, for a small producer to become a slaveowner, for the small slaveowner to grow into a large planter. The fierce competitive struggle made it increasingly difficult for the little men to keep their heads above water; thrust them into a debtor's servitude to merchants, bankers, slave-traders, or factors; or ruined them completely. During the fifties there occurred a horrifying fall in the number of small farms, a tremendous increase of indebtedness, and a general shutting down of economic opportunities among the Southern middle classes. In the midst of this devastating crisis the First Families of the South continued to prosper.

These conditions could not fail to arouse bitter resentment against the cotton aristocrats among the less favored whites. Hinton Helper's The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It (1857) was in essence nothing but a bill of particulars drawn up by an angry advocate for the oppressed Southern middle classes in their case against "the lords of the lash." The sharpening antagonism between the large planters and the small farmers was one of the significant symptoms of the developing crisis in the South.

The economic stagnation within the Cotton Kingdom combined with urgent political considerations to speed up the Southern campaign for the extension of slavery into the territories and for the conquest of new lands. In order to maintain their balance of power within the Federal Government the slaveholders strove to make slave states out of Kansas and Nebraska. Political con-

siderations played a no less important part in the drive toward the tropics. The emancipation of the slaves in the English and Mexican dominions coupled with the expansion of the free states in the Union threatened the slave states with encirclement by a ring of free territory. Slavery was being penned within a narrowing room which threatened it with slow suffocation.

Throughout the fifties the slaveholders made numerous abortive attempts to break through this encirclement by going further to the West and further to the South. Strenuous efforts to carry cotton culture into Missouri, Kansas, and other states where natural conditions were less favorable than in the South, met with failure. As the New Orleans Bee pointed out at the height of the conflict over "Bloody Kansas:" "Slavery will go where it will pay. No slaveholder for the sake of an abstraction will amuse himself by earning five percent in Kansas on the labor of his chattels, when with absolutely less toil it will give him fifteen percent on the cotton and rice fields of Louisiana." The incorporation of New Mexico and California into the Union held out little hope of relief, owing to their remoteness and high costs of transportation, especially after the Californians barred slavery.

The Southerners hoped to appease their craving for rich land in the tropics. Adventurous agents instigated insurrections in Cuba and the countries of Central America with the design of duplicating their Texan coup and setting up new outposts of the slave empire. These unofficial expeditions were in some cases supported and supplemented by official intrigue and action. The Ostend Manifesto of 1854, signed by three pro-slavery American ministers to Europe, including Buchanan who was to become President two years later, proclaimed with brutal frankness the determination of the Southern slavemasters to take Cuba from Spain. There was considerable talk in slaveholding circles of adding the Valley of the Amazon to their possessions. North America was becoming too small for the most ambitious of the slaveholders.

But all these dreams of empire could not be carried into execution owing to opposition from the free states. The slaveholders no longer had enough political weight to unite a coalition behind them sufficiently strong to inveigle the nation into another foreign war. Thus the conquest of new lands was at one and the same time necessary and impossible for the planters. Their representatives wrestled with this dilemma in the sphere of foreign policy throughout the fifties without finding any satisfactory conclusion. In the end there seemed only one means open to obtain a free hand for the execution of their plans of imperial conquest. That was to cut loose from their bondage to the free states in the Union.

The way to acquire additional slave labor and lower the high price of slaves was to remove the restrictions upon the foreign slave trade. The law forbidding the slave trade was, in effect, a protection of the American-grown black against the foreign product. The prohibition of cotton blacks seemed as odious and oppressive to the cotton planters as the protective tariff upon cotton fabrics.

The uninterrupted rise in the price of slaves led to extensive agitation for the reopening of the African slave trade.

Proposals to this effect were debated and approved at the commercial conventions held in the Southern capitals during the late fifties. In 1859 prominent secessionists organized the African Labor Supply Association to promote the movement for the legalization of the slave trade. Its advocates argued that the renewal of the traffic would cheapen the cost of slaves and enable the slaveholders to compete with the free farmers from the East and Europe in settling beyond the Mississippi and controlling it politically. They likewise saw in this repeal an opportunity for binding the discontented poor white farmers of the South more firmly to the slave system by making slaves available to them.

But this clever scheme for the cheap mass distribution of slaves, like kindred Utopian proposals for the mass distribution of property under industrial capitalism, never advanced beyond the stage of conversation for impregnable economic reasons. The proposal to renew the foreign slave trade conflicted with the vested interests of the slave-breeders on the one hand and the large slaveowners on the other. The first were opposed to having their monopoly broken down or the price of their product lowered; the latter were opposed to having the value of their property in human beings depressed.

Although this agitation proved fruitless, the insistent demand for slaves gave an impetus to the illegal trade which had been carried surreptitiously and even flagrantly since 1808. It has been estimated that 270,000 slaves were smuggled into the country between 1808 and the Civil War. The traffic more than doubled from 1857 on. The number of successful ventures can be estimated from the fact that twenty vessels were seized as slavers by a friendly Federal government in the last nine months of 1859. Southern juries usually refused to convict arrested slave traders and even the Federal authorities were lenient so long as the friends of the slave power controlled the government. The Republican assumption of power not only meant sterner prosecution for the illegal slave traders but snuffed out any hope of removing the constitutional prohibitions on the trade.

Secession seemed to hold out the promise of a definitive solution of this problem. Here, too, the slaveholders were deluded. Opposition from the slave-breeders prevented even the Confederacy from legalizing the importation of slaves.

A few planters turned toward the employment of white day laborers. Cheap white labor here and there supplemented the more expensive slave labor especially in such dangerous and unproductive work as ditch-digging and draining in malarial swamps where planters hesitated to risk the lives of their valuable field hands. "If the Irishman died," it was said, "it merely increased the Kingdom of Heaven; if a slave were killed there was \$1,500 gone!"

But environing social circumstances prevented free white labor from replacing black slavery to any extent. The poor whites refused to work side by side on an equal footing with the slaves while Irish and German immigrants shunned the slave states like plague spots. If wage-labor was more productive, it was far less

dependable. Hired hands were liable to strike and demand higher wages in the midst of a harvest, to get drunk and not appear for work, or to quit the plantation if working conditions were unsatisfactory. Thus slavery tended to perpetuate itself and ward off the encroachments of alternative forms of labor.

Along with their campaign to reopen the slave trade, the slaveholders' representatives in Congress launched a drive to lower the tariff rates. They succeeded in forcing down the rates to their lowest levels since 1807 toward the end of the 1850s. But this reduction in rates brought them little relief.

Simultaneously with these activities during the forties and fifties progressive planters and ambitious Southern capitalists made energetic efforts to diversify their economy and to catch up with their Northern rivals in the spheres of transportation and industry. Conventions for the promotion of commerce, for the improvement of agriculture, and for the building of railroads were held in leading Southern cities. An all-Southern Commercial Convention met annually after 1852 to discuss such problems connected with the economic advancement of the South as the establishment of direct steamship lines to Europe, a Southern Pacific railroad, the encouragement of Southern manufactures, and the improvement of waterways.

These commercial conventions were the nuclei of the future Confederacy. The most prominent secessionist leaders, DeBow, Yancey, Ruffin and their associates, were the promoters and keynote speakers of these meetings. Here the seeds of secessionism were sown and nurtured. Here the interests of the slave system could be discussed in common without regard for the claims of other parts of the country. Here Southern economists and politicians came forward with their schemes to strengthen and save the ailing South.

The physicians who congregated at the bedside of the slave economy had no lack of prescriptions for restoring their patient's health.

They were in general agreement that railroads were the indispensable foundation of economic progress. Every Southern metropolis dreamed of becoming a railroad center and terminal of traffic. Mobile aimed to get a share of the shipping that floated down the Mississippi to New Orleans, just as Norfolk hoped to divert toward itself part of New York's commerce. Even the complacent New Orleans merchants were compelled by its rivals' threats to its supremacy to enter the railroad construction race in which the whole country participated from 1849 on.

The Southern cities had a joint interest in snatching the trade of the Upper Mississippi Valley from the North. Plans for linking the Ohio Valley with the South had been broached as early as 1836 at a railroad convention in Knoxville headed by the great Southern statesman Hayne. Most of these grandiose projects remained on paper; others proceeded very slowly. During the forties the South built mainly short local lines. Railroad construction spurted forward with the Congressional land-grant to

the Illinois Central Railroad in 1850. The rate of construction in the South during that decade was greater than in the rest of the country, though this was because the section had fallen so far behind in the preceding decade. From 1850 to 1860 its total trackage jumped from two to ten thousand miles, over a third of that in the nation.

The main lines connecting the slave states with the Middle West were not completed, however, until after the decade ended when the trunk lines from the Northeast had already reached into the West as far as Chicago and St. Louis. The South could not keep abreast of the North in the railroad race. The most important result of the railroad building during the fifties was its unification of the scattered slave states, the extension of their area, and more centralization of their economy. The embryonic Confederacy was given an iron framework.

Parallel projects for steamship lines between the Southern ports and Europe materialized in few cases. Those established either failed or handled only a small volume of the coastwise and transatlantic shipping. These remained, as before, in the hands of Northern shipmasters.

Despite the urgent appeals of forward-looking Southern economists to lessen their dependence upon the North by diversifying their one-crop economy, the development of industry proceeded at a snail's pace in the Cotton Kingdom. The slave economy interposed formidable barriers in the way of the advance of Southern industry. The necessity for sinking enormous sums of money annually into slave and land devoured the surplus capital of the planter; Northern and English capital found more attractive investments elsewhere.

Textile manufacturing was the natural first step toward industrializing the South. "The planters know that their production of cotton is at a sacrifice which looks to ruinous consequences because the substance of their land is annually wasting away," remarked the far-sighted economist, J.D.B. DeBow. "The remedy which we now insist upon is for the planter to resolve that the cotton mills shall be brought to the cotton fields; that they have been paying toll to the English mill long enough." By fabricating their own textiles the Southern capitalists, according to DeBow's reckoning, would not only provide employment for their poor whites but would buttress their world monopoly of cotton cultivation with a similar monopoly of manufacture and selling of cotton goods.

But when ambitious entrepreneurs did set up textile factories, they encountered all sorts of troubles. There was an absence of experienced and reliable factory hands. Slave labor could not serve as a basis for factory production while it prevented the growth of a class of white wage workers. Slavery also discouraged immigration. White workers not only suffered from the competition of slave labor but felt keenly the social stigma attached to their occupations in the South and the absence of an atmosphere of social freedom and political equality. Attempts to import skilled female operatives from New England failed. Not even higher wages would induce them to stay in the slave states.

A weak textile industry could not stand up against competition

from New and Old England. The infant industry required tender nursing and state subsidy in order to thrive. As it was, the flood of cotton goods from outside sources stifled Southern cotton manufacturing in its cradle.

As a result, although the material prerequisites for textile manufacturing were at hand, the industry made slow progress in the pre-war South. During the forties and fifties only a few of the cotton mills established in various parts of the South prospered. The majority went under. That the slave economy alone held back the expansion of the textile industry to considerable dimensions was made manifest by the leap forward taken by the industry after the ravages of Reconstruction were healed.

The efforts to implant industry in the slave states failed to meet with consistent encouragement from their rulers. So long as prosperity haloed the head of King Cotton, most of the planters were satisfied with his regime and were little disposed to worry their heads about industrial enterprise. Some recognized, too, that the factory was the Trojan horse which introduced a mortal enemy inside their citadel. No sooner had textile manufacturers set up their machinery than they began to demand a protective tariff in concert with their colleagues above the Mason-Dixon line. On his visit to the United States Charles Lyell reported that at Columbus, Georgia: "The water-power at the rapids has been recently applied to some newly-erected cotton-mills, and already an anti-free trade party is beginning to be formed."

The planters could hardly be expected to nurse the abominable high-tariff viper in their bosom. The proposals to industrialize the South meant a radical break with all they held dear, a surrender in principle to their Northern antagonist. The cotton lords were far from confessing their bankruptcy. On the contrary, in season and out, they proclaimed their confidence in the omnipotence of the Cotton Kingdom and their undying fealty to its King.

The slaveholders listened more attentively to suggestions which did not involve the undermining of their established institutions or entail the abandonment of their cherished practices. Not the least popular was a plan for joining the newly settled regions of the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Coast into an indissoluble economic union with the South. Circumstances at first seemed to favor the consummation of such a commercial alliance. The Southern and Middle Western states were already connected by numerous close ties. The South was considerably nearer to the Pacific than the North. The grand waterway of the Mississippi was the natural outlet for the products and people of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. These states had originally been colonized by emigrants from the slave states. The planters consumed many of the products of Middle-West agriculture. The largely Democratic farming population there had long been political helpmates of the planters against the Whig businessmen of the North.

One key to the success of this project lay in the building of railroads linking these regions with the commercial centers of the South. The Illinois Central Railroad was planned as the

first link of a grand trunk line which, together with the Mobile and Ohio, would join the Great Lakes to the Gulf. Shortly afterwards New Orleans capitalists projected the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern route which was to extend up from New Orleans to the North and thereby counteract the competition of the road from Ohio to Mobile.

In comparison with the North, these roads crawled toward their destinations. The New Orleans road was not connected until January 1860; the Mobile and Ohio not until April 1861, too late to stave off the Civil War yet just in time to help the South wage it more effectively.

The railroad to the Pacific was not even begun. Although everyone in the South and in the North acknowledged that a line to the Pacific Coast was necessary and inevitable and that private capital could not sustain the enterprise without government aid, no Congressional majority could agree upon the route, the Eastern terminus or the amount of federal government subsidy. Each specific bill for an all-Southern route was killed in Congress and the deadlock continued until after the Civil War. Although a strip of land was purchased from Mexico especially with a view to constructing a Southern road, the proposition got no further toward realization than an appropriation enabling the Secretary of War to survey as many routes as he thought proper.

The main currents of economic development in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Coast were running against such a union with the South. The new railroad network together with the telegraph and canals was diverting the trade of the grain kingdom from the mouth of the Mississippi to the Northern ports. Trade was irresistibly attracted from the agricultural West to the industrial North by better shipping and financing facilities, by the enormous extension of Eastern markets, and their closer proximity to Europe. The influx of Eastern and European immigrants, detesting slavery and all its works and profiting little from it, broke the old social and political ties between West and South. Though they strove to retain both, the Eastern markets became more important to the West than the Southern markets. The beginnings of industry in the Middle West forged another link between that region and the Northeast. The Far West was likewise bound to the East by a similar labor system, the telegraph, the merchant marine, and its goldmines.

Economic union with the Middle West and the Pacific Coast was to be the first step in a larger scheme for the formation of an international commercial empire constituted by industrial England, the cotton states, and the food-raising West. The slave states were to form the keystone of this magnificent edifice. This plan was outlined in the glowing prospectus by the author of "Cotton is King!"

"Slavery attains its importance to the nation and to the world by standing as an agency, intermediate between the grain-growing states and our foreign commerce. As the distillers of the West transformed their surplus grain into whiskey, that it might bear transport, so slavery takes the products of the North and metamorphoses them into cotton, that they may bear export." In this way, there "was a tripartite alliance formed, by which the

Western farmer, the Southern planter, and the English manufacturer have become united in a common bond of interest, the whole giving their support to the doctrine of free trade."

According to this scheme, the North was to be deprived of its industries and converted into an agricultural province of the South. Ironically, the role of intermediary between the Western farmers and industrial Europe which the proponents of this bold plan assigned to the South was actually assumed by the manufacturers and merchants of the North. It was not the North but the South which was transformed into an agricultural appendage and excluded from the benefits of mid-Western trade.

The intelligent experiments of Southern agronomists in diversifying Southern economy met with scanty success. A few ill-fated attempts at tea and silk raising in South Carolina and in more scientific agriculture by Edmund Ruffin of Virginia and others constituted spasmodic efforts along these lines. The improvement of Southern agriculture was retarded by the same general causes that hobbled the development of industry: the inefficiency and expensiveness of slave labor, the cultural and social backwardness of the South, the lack of capital and any incentive for its employment in other fields of agriculture.

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The difficulties of the slaveholders were multiplied and aggravated by the very means they took to overcome them. The extension of cotton production resulted in so great a concentration of capital that thousands upon thousands of small proprietors were ruined and the antagonism between the plantation plutocracy and the rest of the whites increased. Their struggle for new lands led to conflict with the North and neighboring nations. The agitation for the reopening of the foreign slave trade divided the slave states rather than united them. The tariff reductions widened the breach with the Northern industrialists without cheapening their costs of production to an appreciable degree. To cap it all, the costs of production continued to rise. Twist and turn as they might, the slaveholders could not disentangle themselves from these intolerable contradictions.

The planters were tormented not only by the infirmities and backwardness of their peculiar system of production but by the humiliating dependence upon the North which flowed from it. This dependence was virtually complete. The Southern states depended upon Northern capital for the credit required to carry on production and for the capital to build railroads or establish manufactures. They depended upon Northern merchants for the export of commodities to Europe and for the importation of goods from Europe. They depended upon Northern mills for the making of their cotton into cloth. They depended upon the North for most of the necessities used upon the plantations and for every luxury known to the towns. They depended upon Northern shipyards for their ships and upon Northern mines and iron-works for their railroad supplies and machinery. They were even dependent upon the North for their culture, education, and entertainment. The slave states were, in effect, virtually a Northern colony.

The Southerners' resentment against this dependence burst

forth continually. "At present, the North fattens and grows rich upon the South..." complained an Alabama journalist in 1851. "Our slaves are clothed with Northern manufactured goods, have Northern hats and shoes, work with Northern hoes, ploughs, and other implements, are chastised with a Northern-made instrument, are working for Northern more than Southern profit. The slaveholder dresses in Northern goods, rides in a Northern saddle...patronizes Northern newspapers, drinks Northern liquors, reads Northern books, spends his money at Northern watering places...In Northern vessels his products are carried to market, his cotton is ginned with Northern gins, his sugar is crushed and preserved by Northern machinery; his rivers are navigated by Northern steamboats, his mails are carried in Northern stages, his negroes are fed with Northern bacon, beef, flour and corn; his land is cleared with a Northern axe, and a Yankee clock sits upon his mantel-piece; his floor is swept with a Northern broom, and is covered with a Northern carpet; and his wife dresses herself in a Northern looking-glass;... his son is educated at a Northern college, his daughter receives the finishing polish at a Northern seminary; his doctor graduates at a Northern medical college, his schools are supplied with Northern teachers, and he is furnished with Northern inventions and notions."

Northern capital, said Hinton R. Helper, ruled the Southern whites from the cradle to the grave. "In one way or another we are more or less subservient to the North every day of our lives. In infancy we are swaddled in Northern muslin; in childhood we are humored with Northern gewgaws; in youth we are instructed out of Northern books; at the age of maturity we sow our 'wild oats' on Northern soil; in middle life we exhaust our wealth, our energies and talents in the dishonorable vocation of entailing our dependence on our children and on our children's children and, to the neglect of our own interests and the interests of those around us, in giving aid and succor to every department of Northern power; in the decline of life we remedy our infirmities with Northern canes; in old age we are drugged with Northern physic; and finally, when we die, our inanimate bodies, shrouded in Northern cambric, are stretched upon the bier, borne to the grave in a Northern carriage, entombed with a Northern spade, and memorized with a Northern slab."

One Southern newspaper declared that the "Lord North" of 1851 was a greater oppressor than the Lord North of the British ministry who turned a deaf ear to the petitions of the American colonials in 1775. Southern statisticians calculated that the South paid fifty million dollars in annual taxation to the federal government, of which only one-fifth was returned in the form of federal expenditures, and that the total tribute paid yearly by the South to the North amounted to between one to two hundred millions of dollars.

The following analysis of the annual circulation of capital in the South, based upon figures presented by Dodd, shows what was happening to the proceeds of the plantations. "Although New Orleans was one of the greatest exporting cities in the country, the amount of money on deposit in her banks was insignificant. Less than a third of the returns of cotton which annually left her docks ever found place in her financial institutions. On the other hand,

New York and Philadelphia always had on deposit more money than the total value of her exports. What was true of New Orleans was true of the cotton belt as a whole. Though the cotton, rice and sugar of the South sold for \$119,400,000 in 1850, the total bank deposits of the region amounted to only some \$20,000,000. Ten years later, when the value of the crops had increased to more than \$200,000,000, less than \$30,000,000 was deposited in the banks of the cotton and sugar belt."

The yearly earnings of the South flowed in two different directions. One stream ran back into slaves and land; the other eventually made its way into the reservoirs of Northern and English capital in the shape of tariffs, freights, commissions, and other forms of profit. In either case, the Southern masses received little of this wealth derived from their joint exploitation by the slave magnates of the South and the capitalist overlords of the North.

Mutual relations between the slave and free states were further embittered by the constantly increasing superiority of Northern over Southern economy. The North far outstripped the South not only in industry but in agriculture. Those who shouted "Cotton is King!" could not be totally oblivious of the fact recorded in 1850 census, that the combined value of all the Southern staples, cotton, tobacco, rice, hemp and sugar, scarcely equalled the value of the single hay crop in the North. By 1860 the North possessed three times as many miles of railroad as the South.

While the slaveholders held on to their political hegemony, their relative economic strength was fast declining in favor of their Northern rivals. This was one reason why Hinton Helper's statistical demonstration of the backwardness of the slave states in The Impending Crisis touched so sensitive a nerve and drew such howls of rage from the slaveholders.

The Secessionist Movement

What was to be done in the face of these facts, thinking planters asked themselves. Economic reforms were patently insufficient to give more than temporary relief. The mechanism of the slave economy continued to grind out its terrifying social products. The failure of the slave states to transform their one-sided economic life was manifest, as the South fell farther and farther behind the North in all fields of economic activity. As the constricting crisis coiled more tightly around them, the planters began to rely in greater measure upon political measures for the protection and promotion of their welfare.

During the fifties the slave power employed all the agencies and resources of the Federal Government as weapons in their struggle for supremacy. Command of the national apparatus had become an absolute necessity for the economically enfeebled planters. Yet, just when they needed it, they felt that control slipping from their grasp. The old forms of political action, confined within the framework of the Union, were inadequate to cope with the consequences of the crisis. To wage a successful struggle against their enemies, bolder, more direct forms of action were called for by the changed conditions.

The growing power of the free states made it increasingly

harder for the slaveholders to obtain sufficient satisfaction for their demands. With the rise of the Republicans their old allies in the North became more and more unamenable and restless under their dictates. Such aggressive political measures as the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott decision had served to divide their own forces and solidify the resistance of their opponents. The slaveholders were consequently driven in upon themselves and forced to rely upon their own independent strength. After 1857 more and more Southerners saw the only way out of their impasse in considerably more radical ideas.

The more advanced spokesmen for slaveholding interests began to advocate the boycott of Northern goods and commercial non-intercourse -- the 19th century version of imperialist "sanctions." These suggestions for economic independence could only be a prelude to more serious moves toward political independence. Economic warfare was the harbinger of civil war.

From all sides the hopes and needs of the Southern upper classes converged toward the single solution of secession. South Carolina was the hotbed of the secession movement because there the processes of economic decay had reached the most acute stage. But all over the South hard-pinched agriculturalists clamored for relief. They saw the author of their ills, not in their own system of production, but in the free states to the North which drained away their wealth and obstructed every effort to better their situation. To get rid of Yankee oppression and exploitation became the obsession of Southern radicals.

Thus the deepening crisis revived and fortified the secession movement which represented the slaveholders' ultimate hope of salvation. The secessionist leaders formulated the demands of the ruling whites and assembled them into a unified program for Southern autonomy. They generalized the particular grievances of the various sections of the agricultural population into a comprehensive philosophy, knit them into a political program, and gave their separate impulses a common goal, direction, and mass force.

The secessionist movement was therefore the perfected political expression of the deepening crisis within the chattel slave system. The successful surmounting of episodic crises in the past by the slave power had kept the secessionist movement from coming to fruition. Now the time was ripening for its consummation. The social and political conditions which had up to then enabled the planters to overcome their difficulties within the Republic were fast disappearing. After decades of dazzling progress, the Cotton Kingdom had passed the peak of its power and was slipping down from its formerly unassailable eminence. The secessionist movement represented the last desperate effort on the part of the slaveholders to counteract the operations of the immanent laws of the slave economy and to arrest their decline.

By the surgical operation of separation from the Union the planters hoped to rid themselves at one stroke of all the ills from which they suffered. The secessionists argued that national independence of the slave states would forever guarantee the

existence of their peculiar institution; would enable the slaveholders to throw off their Yankee parasites; would open the door for free expansion toward the tropics; would ensure free trade with the rest of the world; and would draw the Northwest to the South while crushing the North and leaving it prostrate.

These were in great measure fanciful visions. The roots of the evils from which the planters suffered were too deeply embedded in the constitution of the slave system to be cured by secession. Even if Southern independence were achieved -- which was by no means guaranteed -- the life of slavery could not be indefinitely prolonged.

The slave economy was under sentence of death. So expensive a method of production could not stand up much longer in the capitalist world. The abolition of chattel slavery within the British and French empires prefigured the economic future of Southern agriculture. If the Civil War had not forcibly extirpated slavery, the Southern planters would in time have been compelled to emancipate themselves from slavery and change over to other and less costly forms of agricultural labor.

Nor would political autonomy have conferred any fundamental economic independence upon the South. In the Union or out of it, so long as slave agriculture remained the basis of its existence, the South was predestined to remain an economic colony of more advanced powers. At this time two great powers were contending for control of the South: Northern industrial capital on the one hand and English capitalism on the other. The Southern planters had no independent orbit. They had to choose whether they should become satellites of the American or of the English bourgeoisie. In the final analysis, therefore, the struggle around secession was a gambit in the broader struggle between American and British industrial capital for economic supremacy over the agricultural South.

Representatives of Northern capital were aware of Great Britain's stake in secession. That was one potent reason for their obdurate opposition to Southern independence and their distrust of England. This was clearly evidenced in the belligerent attitudes and actions of Lincoln's Secretary of State Seward towards England. To monopolize the exploitation of the South, this fertile field must not fall into the hands of their chief competitor.

When Lincoln was elected President in 1860 and the balance of power in the Federal government shifted heavily to the advantage of the anti-slave forces, the representatives of the slave oligarchy could not abide the loss of their national sovereignty. After they had failed to bluff, bulldoze or blackmail their rivals, they had no recourse but to leave the Union and establish an independent regime under their unimpeded control. This turned out to be simply an alternative road to ruin.

Southern slavery, which was born as an offspring of European capitalism, was slain and buried as a victim of American

industrial capitalism. It was the last of the antiquated forms of production to meet this fate at the hands of the all-conquering Yankee bourgeoisie. After annihilating the slave power, the masters of capitalism no longer had to contend with any formidable pre-capitalist forces within the United States. From then on, their domestic opponents were essential elements of their own system of production.

Foremost among them was the wage-working class and, ironically enough, its Afro-American freedmen. In the century following the Emancipation Proclamation, this segment of the labor force passed from chattel slavery through sharecropping to wage-slavery and then, acquiring a keen awareness of its distinct nationalist identity, became the vanguard of the next American revolution.

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