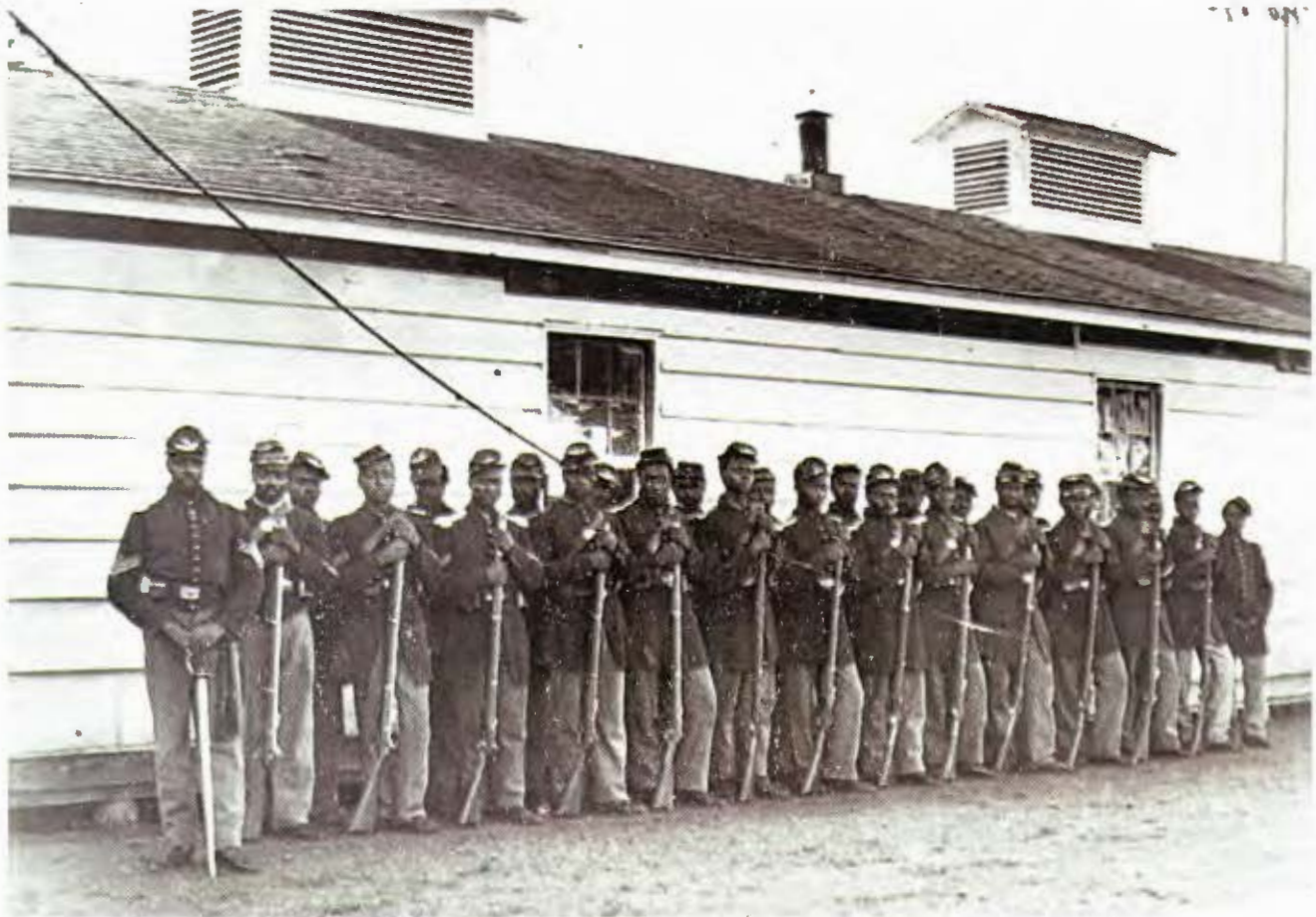




**Internationalist Group**

**League for the Fourth International**

# **Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War**



4th U.S. Colored Regiment at Fort Lincoln, at end of the Civil War (1865).

***Internationalist Group Class Readings***

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75¢



# Karl Marx

## Capital

(Volume I)

1867

### Part III: The Production of Absolute Surplus Value

#### Chapter X: The Working Day

[excerpt]

The slave-owner buys his labourer as he buys his horse. If he loses his slave, he loses capital that can only be restored by new outlay in the slave-market. But "the rice-grounds of Georgia, or the swamps of the Mississippi may be fatally injurious to the human constitution; but the waste of human life which the cultivation of these districts necessitates, is not so great that it cannot be repaired from the teeming preserves of Virginia and Kentucky. Considerations of economy, moreover, which, under a natural system, afford some security for humane treatment by identifying the master's interest with the slave's preservation, when once trading in slaves is practiced, become reasons for racking to the uttermost the toil of the slave; for, when his place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts. It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave-importing countries, that the most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth. It is in tropical culture, where annual profits often equal the whole capital of plantations, that negro life is most recklessly sacrificed. It is the agriculture of the West Indies, which has been for centuries prolific of fabulous wealth, that has engulfed millions of the African race. It is in Cuba, at this day, whose revenues are reckoned by millions, and whose planters are princes, that we see in the servile class, the coarsest fare, the most exhausting and unremitting toil, and even the absolute destruction of a portion of its numbers every year."

# Karl Marx

## Theories of Surplus Value

(Volume IV of *Capital*)

1861

### Part 2, Chapter XII

[excerpt]

In the second type of colonies—plantations—where commercial speculations figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist mode of production exists, although only in a formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labour, which is the basis of capitalist production. But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by capitalists. The method of production which they introduce has not arisen out of slavery but is grafted on to it. In this case the same person is capitalist and landowner. And the elemental [profusion] existence of the land confronting capital and labour does not offer any resistance to capital investment, hence none to the competition between capitals. Neither does a class of farmers as distinct from landlords develop here. So long as these conditions endure, nothing will stand in the way of cost-price regulating market-value.

# Karl Marx

## The North American Civil War<sup>1</sup>

### (October 1861)

For months the leading weekly and daily papers of the London press have been reiterating the same litany on the American Civil War. While they insult the free states of the North, they anxiously defend themselves against the suspicion of sympathising with the slave states of the South. In fact, they continually write two articles: one article, in which they attack the North, and another article, in which they excuse their attacks on the North.

In essence the extenuating arguments read: The war between the North and South is a tariff war. The war is, further, not for any principle, does not touch the question of slavery and in fact turns on Northern lust for sovereignty. Finally, even if justice is on the side of the North, does it not remain a vain endeavour to want to subjugate eight million Anglo-Saxons by force! Would not separation of the South release the North from all connection with Negro slavery and ensure for it, with its twenty million inhabitants and its vast territory, a higher, hitherto scarcely dreamt-of, development? Accordingly, must not the North welcome secession as a happy event, instead of wanting to overrule it by a bloody and futile civil war?

Point by point we will probe the plea of the English press.

The war between North and South -- so runs the first excuse -- is a mere tariff war, a war between a protectionist system and a free trade system, and Britain naturally stands on the side of free trade. Shall the slave-owner enjoy the fruits of slave labour in their entirety or shall he be cheated of a portion of these by the protectionists of the North? That is the question which is at issue in this war. It was reserved for *The Times* to make this brilliant discovery. *The Economist*, *The Examiner*, *The Saturday Review* and tutti quanti expounded the theme further. It is characteristic of this discovery that it was made, not in Charleston, but in London. Naturally, in America everyone knew that from 1846 to 1861 a free trade system prevailed, and that Representative Morrill carried his protectionist tariff through Congress only in 1861, after the rebellion had already broken out. Secession, therefore, did not take place because the Morrill tariff had gone through Congress, but, at most, the Morrill tariff went through Congress because secession had taken place. When South Carolina had its first attack of secession in 1831, the protectionist tariff of 1828 served it, to be sure, as a pretext, but only as a pretext, as is known from a statement of General Jackson. This time, however, the old pretext has in fact not been repeated. In the Secession Congress at Montgomery all reference to the tariff question was avoided, because the cultivation of sugar in Louisiana, one of the most influential Southern states, depends entirely on protection.

But, the London press pleads further, the war of the United States is nothing but a war for the forcible maintenance of the Union. The Yankees cannot make up their minds to strike fifteen stars from their standard. They want to cut a colossal figure on the world stage. Yes, it would be different if the war was waged for the abolition of slavery! The question of slavery, however, as *The Saturday Review* categorically declares among other things, has absolutely nothing to do with this war.

It is above all to be remembered that the war did not originate with the North, but with the South. The North finds itself on the defensive. For months it had quietly looked on while the secessionists appropriated the Union's forts, arsenals, shipyards, customs houses, pay offices, ships and supplies of arms, insulted its flag and took prisoner bodies of its troops. Finally the secessionists resolved to force the Union government out of its passive attitude by a blatant act of war, and solely for this reason proceeded to the bombardment of Fort Sumter near Charleston. On April 11 (1861) their General Beauregard had learnt in a meeting with Major Anderson, the commander of Fort Sumter, that the fort was only supplied with provisions for three days more and accordingly must be peacefully surrendered after this period. In order to forestall this peaceful surrender, the secessionists opened the bombardment early on the following morning (April 12), which brought about the fall of the fort in a few hours.

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *Die Presse* No. 293, 25 October 1861.

News of this had hardly been telegraphed to Montgomery, the seat of the Secession Congress, when War Minister Walker publicly declared in the name of the new Confederacy: No man can say where the war opened today will end. At the same time he prophesied that before the first of May the flag of the Southern Confederacy will wave from the dome of the old Capitol in Washington and within a short time perhaps also from the Faneuil Hall in Boston. Only now ensued the proclamation in which Lincoln called for 75,000 men to defend the Union. The bombardment of Fort Sumter cut off the only possible constitutional way out, namely the convocation of a general convention of the American people, as Lincoln had proposed in his inaugural address. For Lincoln there now remained only the choice of fleeing from Washington, evacuating Maryland and Delaware and surrendering Kentucky, Missouri and Virginia, or of answering war with war.

The question of the principle of the American Civil War is answered by the battle slogan with which the South broke the peace. Stephens, the Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy, declared in the Secession Congress that what essentially distinguished the Constitution newly hatched at Montgomery from the Constitution of Washington and Jefferson was that now for the first time slavery was recognised as an institution good in itself, and as the foundation of the whole state edifice, whereas the revolutionary fathers, men steeped in the prejudices of the eighteenth century, had treated slavery as an evil imported from England and to be eliminated in the course of time. Another matador of the South, Mr. Spratt, cried out: "For us it is a question of founding a great slave republic." If, therefore, it was indeed only in defence of the Union that the North drew the sword, had not the South already declared that the continuance of slavery was no longer compatible with the continuance of the Union?

Just as the bombardment of Fort Sumter gave the signal for the opening of the war, the election victory of the Republican Party of the North, the election of Lincoln as President, gave the signal for secession. On November 6, 1860, Lincoln was elected. On November 8, 1860, a message telegraphed from South Carolina said: Secession is regarded here as an accomplished fact; on November 10 the legislature of Georgia occupied itself with secession plans, and on November 13 a special session of the legislature of Mississippi was convened to consider secession. But Lincoln's election was itself only the result of a split in the Democratic camp. During the election struggle the Democrats of the North concentrated their votes on Douglas, the Democrats of the South concentrated their votes on Breckinridge, and to this splitting of the Democratic votes the Republican Party owed its victory. Whence came, on the one hand, the preponderance of the Republican Party in the North? Whence, on the other, the disunion within the Democratic Party, whose members, North and South, had operated in conjunction for more than half a century?

Under the presidency of Buchanan the sway that the South had gradually usurped over the Union through its alliance with the Northern Democrats attained its zenith. The last Continental Congress of 1787 and the first Constitutional Congress of 1789 -90 had legally excluded slavery from all Territories of the republic north-west of the Ohio. (Territories, as is known, is the name given to the colonies lying within the United States itself which have not yet attained the level of population constitutionally prescribed for the formation of autonomous states.) The so-called Missouri Compromise (1820), in consequence of which Missouri became one of the States of the Union as a slave state, excluded slavery from every remaining Territory north of 36 degrees latitude and west of the Missouri. By this compromise the area of slavery was advanced several degrees of longitude, whilst, on the other hand, a geographical boundary-line to its future spread seemed quite definitely drawn. This geographical barrier, in its turn, was thrown down in 1854 by the so-called Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the initiator of which was St[ephen] A. Douglas, then leader of the Northern Democrats. The Bill, which passed both Houses of Congress, repealed the Missouri Compromise, placed slavery and freedom on the same footing, commanded the Union government to treat them both with equal indifference and left it to the sovereignty of the people, that is, the majority of the settlers, to decide whether or not slavery was to be introduced in a Territory. Thus, for the first time in the history of the United States, every geographical and legal limit to the extension of slavery in the Territories was removed. Under this new legislation the hitherto free Territory of New Mexico, a Territory five times as large as the State of New York, was transformed into a slave Territory, and the area of slavery was extended from the border of the Mexican Republic to 38 degrees north latitude. In 1859 New Mexico received a slave code that vies with the statute-books of Texas and Alabama in barbarity. Nevertheless, as the census of 1860 proves, among some hundred thousand inhabitants New Mexico does not yet count half a hundred slaves. It had therefore sufficed for the South to send some adventurers with a few slaves over the border, and then with the

help of the central government in Washington and of its officials and contractors in New Mexico to drum together a sham popular representation to impose slavery and with it the rule of the slaveholders on the Territory.

However, this convenient method did not prove applicable in other Territories. The South accordingly went a step further and appealed from Congress to the Supreme Court of the United States. This Court, which numbers nine judges, five of whom belong to the South, had long been the most willing tool of the slaveholders. It decided in 1857, in the notorious Dred Scott case, that every American citizen possesses the right to take with him into any territory any property recognized by the Constitution. The Constitution, it maintained, recognises slaves as property and obliges the Union government to protect this property. Consequently, on the basis of the Constitution, slaves could be forced to labour in the Territories by their owners, and so every individual slaveholder was entitled to introduce slavery into hitherto free Territories against the will of the majority of the settlers. The right to exclude slavery was taken from the Territorial legislatures and the duty to protect pioneers of the slave system was imposed on Congress and the Union government.

If the Missouri Compromise of 1820 had extended the geographical boundary-line of slavery in the Territories, if the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854 had erased every geographical boundary-line and set up a political barrier instead, the will of the majority of the settlers, now the Supreme Court of the United States, by its decision of 1857, tore down even this political barrier and transformed all the Territories of the republic, present and future, from nurseries of free states into nurseries of slavery.

At the same time, under Buchanan's government the severer law on the surrendering of fugitive slaves enacted in 1850 was ruthlessly carried out in the states of the North. To play the part of slave-catchers for the Southern slaveholders appeared to be the constitutional calling of the North. On the other hand, in order to hinder as far as possible the colonisation of the Territories by free settlers, the slaveholders' party frustrated all the so-called free-soil measures, i.e., measures which were to secure for the settlers a definite amount of uncultivated state land free of charge.

In the foreign, as in the domestic, policy of the United States, the interest of the slaveholders served as the guiding star. Buchanan had in fact bought the office of President through the issue of the Ostend Manifesto, in which the acquisition of Cuba, whether by purchase or by force of arms, was proclaimed as the great task of national policy. Under his government northern Mexico was already divided among American land speculators, who impatiently awaited the signal to fall on Chihuahua, Coahuila and Sonora. The unceasing piratical expeditions of the filibusters against the states of Central America were directed no less from the White House at Washington. In the closest connection with this foreign policy, whose manifest purpose was conquest of new territory for the spread of slavery and of the slaveholders' rule, stood the reopening of the slave trade, secretly supported by the Union government. St[ephen] A. Douglas himself declared in the American Senate on August 20, 1859: During the last year more Negroes have been imported from Africa than ever before in any single year, even at the time when the slave trade was still legal. The number of slaves imported in the last year totalled fifteen thousand.

Armed spreading of slavery abroad was the avowed aim of national policy; the Union had in fact become the slave of the three hundred thousand slaveholders who held sway over the South. A series of compromises, which the South owed to its alliance with the Northern Democrats, had led to this result. On this alliance all the attempts, periodically repeated since 1817, to resist the ever increasing encroachments of the slaveholders had hitherto come to grief. At length there came a turning point.

For hardly had the Kansas-Nebraska Bill gone through, which wiped out the geographical boundary-line of slavery and made its introduction into new Territories subject to the will of the majority of the settlers, when armed emissaries of the slaveholders, border rabble from Missouri and Arkansas, with bowie-knife in one hand and revolver in the other, fell upon Kansas and sought by the most unheard-of atrocities to dislodge its settlers from the Territory colonised by them. These raids were supported by the central government in Washington. Hence a tremendous reaction. Throughout the North, but particularly in the North-west, a relief organisation was formed to support Kansas with men, arms and money. Out of this relief organisation arose the Republican Party, which therefore owes its origin to the struggle for Kansas. After the attempt to transform Kansas into a slave Territory by force of arms had failed, the South sought to achieve the same result by political intrigues. Buchanan's government, in particular, exerted its utmost efforts to have Kansas included in the States of the



Union as a slave state with a slave constitution imposed on it. Hence renewed struggle, this time mainly conducted in Congress at Washington. Even St[ephen] A. Douglas, the chief of the Northern Democrats, now (1857 - 58) entered the lists against the government and his allies of the South, because imposition of a slave constitution would have been contrary to the principle of sovereignty of the settlers passed in the Nebraska Bill of 1854. Douglas, Senator for Illinois, a North-western state, would naturally have lost all his influence if he had wanted to concede to the South the right to steal by force of arms or through acts of Congress Territories colonised by the North. As the struggle for Kansas, therefore, called the Republican Party into being, it at the same time occasioned the first split within the Democratic Party itself.

The Republican Party put forward its first platform for the presidential election in 1856. Although its candidate, John Fremont, was not victorious, the huge number of votes cast for him at any rate proved the rapid growth of the Party, particularly in the North-west. At their second National Convention for the presidential election (May 17, 1860), the Republicans again put forward their platform of 1856, only enriched by some additions. Its principal contents were the following: Not a foot of fresh territory is further conceded to slavery. The filibustering policy abroad must cease. The reopening of the slave trade is stigmatised. Finally, free-soil laws are to be enacted for the furtherance of free colonisation.

The vitally important point in this platform was that not a foot of fresh terrain was conceded to slavery; rather it was to remain once and for all confined within the boundaries of the states where it already legally existed. Slavery was thus to be formally interned; but continual expansion of territory and continual spread of slavery beyond its old limits is a law of life for the slave states of the Union.

The cultivation of the southern export articles, cotton, tobacco, sugar, etc., carried on by slaves, is only remunerative as long as it is conducted with large gangs of slaves, on a mass scale and on wide expanses of a naturally fertile soil, which requires only simple labour. Intensive cultivation, which depends less on fertility of the soil than on investment of capital, intelligence and energy of labour, is contrary to the nature of slavery. Hence the rapid transformation of states like Maryland and Virginia, which formerly employed slaves on the production of export articles, into states which raise slaves to export them into the deep South. Even in South Carolina, where the slaves form four-sevenths of the population, the cultivation of cotton has been almost completely stationary for years due to the exhaustion of the soil. Indeed, by force of circumstances South Carolina has already been transformed in part into a slave-raising state, since it already sells slaves to the sum of four million dollars yearly to the states of the extreme South and South-west. As soon as this point is reached, the acquisition of new Territories becomes necessary, so that one section of the slaveholders with their slaves may occupy new fertile lands and that a new market for slave-raising, therefore for the sale of slaves, may be created for the remaining section. It is, for example, indubitable that without the acquisition of Louisiana, Missouri and Arkansas by the United States, slavery in Virginia and Maryland would have been wiped out long ago. In the Secessionist Congress at Montgomery, Senator Toombs, one of the spokesmen of the South, strikingly formulated the economic law that commands the constant expansion of the territory of slavery. "In fifteen years," said he, "without a great increase in slave territory, either the slaves must be permitted to flee from the whites, or the whites must flee from the slaves."

As is known, the representation of the individual states in the Congress House of Representatives depends on the size of their respective populations. As the populations of the free states grow far more quickly than those of the slave states, the number of Northern Representatives was bound to outstrip that of the Southern very rapidly. The real seat of the political power of the South is accordingly transferred more and more to the American Senate, where every state, whether its population is great or small, is represented by two Senators. In order to assert its influence in the Senate and, through the Senate, its hegemony over the United States, the South therefore required a continual formation of new slave states. This, however, was only possible through conquest of foreign lands, as in the case of Texas, or through the transformation of the Territories belonging to the United States first into slave Territories and later into slave states, as in the case of Missouri, Arkansas, etc. John Calhoun, whom the slaveholders admire as their statesman par excellence, stated as early as February 19, 1847, in the Senate, that the Senate alone placed a balance of power in the hands of the South, that extension of the slave territory was necessary to preserve this equilibrium between South and North in the Senate, and that the attempts of the South at the creation of new slave states by force were accordingly justified.

Finally, the number of actual slaveholders in the South of the Union does not amount to more than three hundred thousand, a narrow oligarchy that is confronted with many millions of so-called poor whites, whose numbers have been constantly growing through concentration of landed property and whose condition is only to be compared with that of the Roman plebeians in the period of Rome's extreme decline. Only by acquisition and the prospect of acquisition of new Territories, as well as by filibustering expeditions, is it possible to square the interests of these poor whites with those of the slaveholders, to give their restless thirst for action a harmless direction and to tame them with the prospect of one day becoming slaveholders themselves.

A strict confinement of slavery within its old terrain, therefore, was bound according to economic law to lead to its gradual effacement, in the political sphere to annihilate the hegemony that the slave states exercised through the Senate, and finally to expose the slaveholding oligarchy within its own states to threatening perils from the poor whites. In accordance with the principle that any further extension of slave Territories was to be prohibited by law, the Republicans therefore attacked the rule of the slaveholders at its root. The Republican election victory was accordingly bound to lead to open struggle between North and South. And this election victory, as already mentioned, was itself conditioned by the split in the Democratic camp.

The Kansas struggle had already caused a split between the slaveholders' party and the Democrats of the North allied to it. With the presidential election of 1860, the same strife now broke out again in a more general form. The Democrats of the North, with Douglas as their candidate, made the introduction of slavery into Territories dependent on the will of the majority of the settlers. The slaveholders' party, with Breckinridge as their candidate, maintained that the Constitution of the United States, as the Supreme Court had also declared, brought slavery legally in its train; in and of itself slavery was already legal in all Territories and required no special naturalisation. Whilst, therefore, the Republicans prohibited any extension of slave Territories, the Southern party laid claim to all Territories of the republic as legally warranted domains. What they had attempted by way of example with regard to Kansas, to force slavery on a Territory through the central government against the will of the settlers themselves, they now set up as law for all the Territories of the Union. Such a concession lay beyond the power of the Democratic leaders and would only have occasioned the desertion of their army to the Republican camp. On the other hand, Douglas's settlers' sovereignty could not satisfy the slaveholders' party. What it wanted to effect had to be effected within the next four years under the new President, could only be effected by the resources of the central government and brooked no further delay. It did not escape the slaveholders that a new power had arisen, the North-west, whose population, having almost doubled between 1850 and 1860, was already pretty well equal to the white population of the slave states -- a power that was not inclined either by tradition, temperament or mode of life to let itself be dragged from compromise to compromise in the manner of the old North-eastern states. The Union was still of value to the South only so far as it handed over Federal power to it as a means of carrying out the slave policy. If not, then it was better to make the break now than to look on at the development of the Republican Party and the upsurge of the North-west for another four years and begin the struggle under more unfavourable conditions. The slaveholders' party therefore played *va banque*. When the Democrats of the North declined to go on playing the part of the poor whites of the South, the South secured Lincoln's victory by splitting the vote, and then took this victory as a pretext for drawing the sword from the scabbard.

The whole movement was and is based, as one sees, on the slave question. Not in the sense of whether the slaves within the existing slave states should be emancipated outright or not, but whether the twenty million free men of the North should submit any longer to an oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders; whether the vast Territories of the republic should be nurseries for free states or for slavery; finally, whether the national policy of the Union should take armed spreading of slavery in Mexico, Central and South America as its device.

In another article we will probe the assertion of the London press that the North must sanction secession as the most favourable and only possible solution of the conflict.



# Karl Marx

## The Civil War in the United States<sup>2</sup> (November 1861)

“Let him go, he is not worth thine ire!” Again and again English statesmanship cries - recently through the mouth of Lord John Russell-to the North of the United States this advice of Leporello to Don Juan's deserted love. If the North lets the South go, it then frees itself from any admixture of slavery, from its historical original sin, and creates the basis of a new and higher development.

In reality, if North and South formed two autonomous countries, like, for example, England and Hanover, their separation would be no more difficult than was the separation of England and Hanover. “*The South*,” however, is neither a territory closely sealed off from the North geographically, nor a moral unity. It is not a country at all, but a battle slogan.

The advice of an amicable separation presupposes that the Southern Confederacy, although it assumed the offensive in the Civil War, at least wages it for defensive purposes. It is believed that the issue for the slaveholders' party is merely one of uniting the territories it has hitherto dominated into an autonomous group of states and withdrawing them from the supreme authority of the Union. Nothing could be more false: “*The South needs its entire territory*. It will and must have it.” With this battle-cry the secessionists fell upon Kentucky. By their “entire territory” they understand in the first place all the so-called *border states*-Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. Besides, they lay claim to the entire territory south of the line that runs from the north-west corner of Missouri to the Pacific Ocean. What the slaveholders, therefore, call the South, embraces more than three-quarters of the territory hitherto comprised by the Union. A large part of the territory thus claimed is still in the possession of the Union and would first have to be conquered from it. None of the so-called border states, however, not even those in the possession of the Confederacy, were ever *actual slave states*. Rather, they constitute the area of the United States in which the system of slavery and the system of free labour exist side by side and contend for mastery, the actual field of battle between South and North, between slavery and freedom. The war of the Southern Confederacy is, therefore, not a war of defence, but a war of conquest, a war of conquest for the spread and perpetuation of slavery.

The chain of mountains that begins in Alabama and stretches northwards to the Hudson River-the spinal column, as it were, of the United States-cuts the so-called South into three parts. The mountainous country formed by the Allegheny Mountains with their two parallel ranges, the Cumberland Range to the west and the Blue Mountains to the east, divides wedge-like the lowlands along the western coast of the Atlantic Ocean from the lowlands in the southern valleys of the Mississippi. The two lowlands separated by the mountainous country, with their vast rice swamps and far-flung cotton plantations, are the actual area of slavery. The long wedge of mountainous country driven into the heart of slavery, with its correspondingly clear atmosphere, an invigorating climate and a soil rich in coal, salt, limestone, iron ore, gold, in short, every raw material necessary for a many-sided industrial development, is already for the most part free country. In accordance with its physical constitution, the soil here can only be cultivated with success by free small farmers. Here the slave system vegetates only sporadically and has never struck root. In the largest part of the so-called border states, the dwellers of these highlands comprise the core of the free population, which sides with the Northern party if only for the sake of self-preservation.

Let us consider the contested territory in detail.

*Delaware*, the most north-eastern of the border states, is factually and morally in the possession of the Union. All the attempts of the secessionists at forming even one faction favourable to them have since the beginning of the

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<sup>2</sup> First published in *Die Presse* No. 306, 7 November 1861.

war suffered shipwreck on the unanimity of the population. The slave element of this state has long been in process of dying out. From 1850 to 1860 alone the number of slaves diminished by half, so that with a total population of 112,218 Delaware now numbers only 1,798 slaves. Nevertheless, Delaware is demanded by the Southern Confederacy and would in fact be militarily untenable for the North as soon as the South possessed itself of Maryland.

In *Maryland* itself the above-mentioned conflict between highlands and lowlands takes place. Out of a total population of 687,034 there are here 87,188 slaves. That the overwhelming majority of the population is on the side of the Union has again been strikingly proved by the recent general elections to the Congress in Washington. The army of 30,000 Union troops, which holds Maryland at the moment, is intended not only to serve the army on the Potomac as a reserve, but, in particular, also to hold in check the rebellious slaveowners in the interior of the country. For here we observe a phenomenon similar to what we see in other border states where the great mass of the people stands for the North and a numerically insignificant slaveholders' party for the South. What it lacks in numbers, the slaveholders' party makes up in the means of power that many years' possession of all state offices, hereditary engagement in political intrigue and concentration of great wealth in few hands have secured for it.

*Virginia* now forms the great cantonment where the main army of secession and the main army of the Union confront each other. In the north-west highlands of Virginia the number of slaves is 15,000, whilst the twenty times as large free population consists mostly of free farmers. The eastern lowlands of Virginia, on the other hand, count well-nigh half a million slaves. Raising Negroes and the sale of the Negroes to the Southern states form the principal source of income of these lowlands. As soon as the ringleaders of the lowlands had carried through the secession ordinance by intrigues in the state legislature at Richmond and had in all haste opened the gates of Virginia to the Southern army, north-west Virginia seceded from the secession, formed a new state, and under the banner of the Union now defends its territory arms in hand against the Southern invaders.

*Tennessee*, with 1,109,847 inhabitants, 275,784 of whom are slaves, finds itself in the hands of the Southern Confederacy, which has placed the whole state under martial law and under a system of proscription which recalls the days of the Roman Triumvirates. When in the winter of 1861 the slaveholders proposed a general convention of the people which was to vote for secession or non-secession, the majority of the people rejected any convention, in order to remove any pretext for the secession movement. Later, when Tennessee was already militarily over-run and subjected to a system of terror by the Southern Confederacy, more than a third of the voters at the elections still declared themselves for the Union. Here, as in most of the border states, the mountainous country, *east Tennessee*, forms the real centre of resistance to the slaveholders' party. On June 17, 1861, a General Convention of the people of east Tennessee assembled in Greenville, declared itself for the Union, deputed the former governor of the state, Andrew Johnson, one of the most ardent Unionists, to the Senate in Washington and published a "declaration of grievances," which lays bare all the means of deception, intrigue and terror by which Tennessee was "voted out" of the Union. Since then the secessionists have held east Tennessee in check by force of arms.

Similar relationships to those in West Virginia and east Tennessee are found in the north of Alabama, in north-west Georgia and in the north of North Carolina.

Further west, in the border state of *Missouri*, with 1,173,317 inhabitants and 114,965 slaves-the latter mostly concentrated in the north-west of the state-the people's convention of August 1861 decided for the Union. Jackson, the governor of the state and the tool of the slaveholders' party, rebelled against the legislature of Missouri, was outlawed and took the lead of the armed hordes that fell upon Missouri from Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee, in order to bring it to its knees before the Confederacy and sever its bond with the Union by the sword. Next to Virginia, Missouri is at the present moment the main theatre of the Civil War.

*New Mexico*-not a state, but merely a Territory, into which twenty-five slaves were imported during Buchanan's presidency in order to send a slave constitution after them from Washington-had no craving for the South, as even the latter concedes. But the South has a craving for New Mexico and accordingly spewed an armed band of adventurers from *Texas* over the border. New Mexico has implored the protection of the Union government against these liberators.

It will have been observed that we lay particular emphasis on the numerical proportion of slaves to free men in the individual border states. This proportion is in fact decisive. It is the thermometer with which the vital fire of the slave system must be measured. The soul of the whole secession movement is *South Carolina*. It has 402,541 slaves and 301,271 free men. *Mississippi*, which has given the Southern Confederacy its dictator, Jefferson Davis, comes second. It has 436,696 slaves and 354,699 free men. *Alabama* comes third, with 435,132 slaves and 529,164 free men.

The last of the contested border states, which we have still to mention, is *Kentucky*. Its recent history is particularly characteristic of the policy of the Southern Confederacy. Among its 1,135,713 inhabitants Kentucky has 225,490 slaves. In three successive general elections by the people—in the winter of 1861, when elections to a congress of the border states were held; in June 1861, when elections to the Congress in Washington took place; finally, in August 1861, in elections to the legislature of the State of Kentucky—an ever increasing majority decided for the Union. On the other hand, Magoffin, the Governor of Kentucky, and all the high officials of the state are fanatical supporters of the slaveholders' party, as is Breckinridge, Kentucky's representative in the Senate in Washington, Vice-President of the United States under Buchanan, and candidate of the slaveholders' party in the presidential election of 1860. Too weak to win over Kentucky for secession, the influence of the slaveholders' party was strong enough to make this state amenable to a declaration of neutrality on the outbreak of war. The Confederacy recognised the neutrality as long as it served its purposes, as long as the Confederacy itself was engaged in crushing the resistance in east Tennessee. Hardly was this end attained when it knocked at the gates of Kentucky with the butt of a gun to the cry of: "*The South needs its entire territory. It will and must have it!*"

From the south-west and south-east its corps of free-booters simultaneously invaded the "neutral" state. Kentucky awoke from its dream of neutrality, its legislature openly took sides with the Union, surrounded the traitorous Governor with a committee of public safety, called the people to arms, outlawed Breckinridge and ordered the secessionists to evacuate the invaded territory immediately. This was the signal for war. An army of the Southern Confederacy is moving on Louisville, while volunteers from Illinois, Indiana and Ohio flock hither to save Kentucky from the armed missionaries of slavery.

The attempts of the Confederacy to annex Missouri and Kentucky, for example, against the will of these states, prove the hollowness of the pretext that it is fighting for the rights of the individual states against the encroachments of the Union. On the individual states that it considers to belong to the "South" it confers, to be sure, the right to separate from the Union, but by no means the right to remain in the Union.

Even the actual slave states, however much external war, internal military dictatorship and slavery give them everywhere for the moment a semblance of harmony, are nevertheless not without oppositional elements. A striking example is *Texas*, with 180,388 slaves out of 601,039 inhabitants. The law of 1845, by virtue of which Texas became a State of the Union as a slave state, entitled it to form not merely one, but five states out of its territory. The South would thereby have gained ten new votes instead of two in the American Senate, and an increase in the number of its votes in the Senate was a major object of its policy at that time. From 1845 to 1860, however, the slaveholders found it impracticable to cut up Texas, where the German population plays an important part, into even two states without giving the party of free labour the upper hand over the party of slavery in the second state. This furnishes the best proof of the strength of the opposition to the slaveholding oligarchy in Texas itself.

*Georgia* is the largest and most populous of the slave states. It has 462,230 slaves out of a total of 1,057,327 inhabitants, therefore nearly half the population. Nevertheless, the slaveholders' party has not so far succeeded in getting the Constitution imposed on the South at Montgomery sanctioned by a general vote of the people in Georgia.

In the State Convention of *Louisiana*, meeting on March 21, 1861, at New Orleans, Roselius, the political veteran of the state, declared:

"The Montgomery Constitution is not a constitution, but a conspiracy. It does not inaugurate a government of the people, but a *detestable and unrestricted oligarchy*. The people were not permitted to have any say in this matter.

The Convention of Montgomery has dug the grave of political liberty, and now we are summoned to attend its burial.”

Indeed, the oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders utilised the Congress of Montgomery not only to proclaim the separation of the South from the North. It exploited it at the same time to reshape the internal constitutions of the slave states, to subjugate completely the section of the white population that had still preserved some independence under the protection and the democratic Constitution of the Union. Between 1856 to 1860 the political spokesmen, jurists, moralists and theologians of the slaveholders' party had already sought to prove, not so much that Negro slavery is justified, but rather that colour is a matter of indifference and the working class is everywhere born to slavery.

One sees, therefore, that the war of the Southern Confederacy is in the true sense of the word a war of conquest for the spread and perpetuation of slavery. The greater part of the border states and Territories are still in the possession of the Union, whose side they have taken first through the ballot-box and then with arms. The Confederacy, however, counts them for the “*South*” and seeks to conquer them from the Union. In the border states which the Confederacy has occupied for the time being, it is holding the relatively free highlands in check by martial law. Within the actual slave states themselves it is supplanting the hitherto existing democracy by the unrestricted oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders.

Were it to relinquish its plans of conquest, the Southern Confederacy would relinquish its capacity to live and the purpose of secession. Secession, indeed, only took place because within the Union the transformation of the border states and Territories into slave states seemed no longer attainable. On the other hand, were it to cede the contested territory peacefully to the Southern Confederacy, the North would surrender to the slave republic more than three-quarters of the entire territory of the United States. The North would lose the whole of the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, except the narrow strip from Penobscot Bay to Delaware Bay, and would even cut itself off from the Pacific Ocean. Missouri, Kansas, New Mexico, Arkansas and Texas would draw California after them. Incapable of wresting the mouth of the Mississippi from the hands of the strong, hostile slave republic in the South, the great agricultural states in the basin between the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghenies, in the valleys of the Mississippi, the Missouri and the Ohio, would be compelled by their economic interests to secede from the North and enter the Southern Confederacy. These north-western states, in their turn, would draw after them into the same whirlpool of secession all the Northern states lying further east, with perhaps the exception of the states of New England.

What would in fact take place would be not a dissolution of the Union, but a *reorganisation* of it, a *reorganisation on the basis of slavery*, under the recognised control of the slaveholding oligarchy. The plan of such a reorganisation has been openly proclaimed by the principal speakers of the South at the Congress of Montgomery and explains the paragraph of the new Constitution which leaves it open to every state of the old Union to join the new Confederacy. The slave system would infect the whole Union. In the Northern states, where Negro slavery is in practice unworkable, the white working class would gradually be forced down to the level of helotry. This would fully accord with the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom, and as the actual labour is the lot of the Negro in the South, so in the North it is the lot of the German and the Irishman, or their direct descendants.

The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other.

If the border states, the disputed areas in which the two systems have hitherto contended for domination, are a thorn in the flesh of the South, there can, on the other hand, be no mistake that, in the course of the war up to now, they have constituted the chief weakness of the North. One section of the slaveholders in these districts simulated loyalty to the North at the bidding of the conspirators in the South; another section found that in fact it was in accordance with their real interests and traditional ideas to go with the Union. Both sections have equally crippled the North. Anxiety to keep the “loyal” slaveholders of the border states in good humour, fear of throwing them into the arms of secession, in a word, tender regard for the interests, prejudices and sensibilities of these

ambiguous allies, has smitten the Union government with incurable weakness since the beginning of the war, driven it to half measures, forced it to dissemble away the principle of the war and to spare the foe's most vulnerable spot, the root of the evil-*slavery itself*.

When, only recently, Lincoln pusillanimously revoked Frémont's Missouri proclamation on the emancipation of Negroes belonging to the rebels, this was done solely out of regard for the loud protest of the "loyal" slaveholders of Kentucky. However, a turning point has already been reached. With Kentucky, the last border state has been pushed into the series of battlefields between South and North. With the real war for the border states in the border states themselves, the question of winning or losing them is withdrawn from the sphere of diplomatic and parliamentary discussions. One section of slaveholders will throw off the mask of loyalty; the other will content itself with the prospect of a financial compensation such as Great Britain gave the West Indian planters. Events themselves drive to the promulgation of the decisive slogan-*emancipation of the slaves*.

That even the most hardened Democrats and diplomats of the North feel themselves drawn to this point, is shown by some announcements of very recent date. In an open letter, General *Cass*, Secretary of State for War under Buchanan and hitherto one of the most ardent allies of the South, declares emancipation of the slaves the *conditio sine qua non* of the Union's salvation. In his last *Review* for October, Dr. *Brownson*, the spokesman of the Catholic party of the North, on his own admission the most energetic adversary of the emancipation movement from 1836 to 1860, publishes an article *for Abolition*.

"If we have opposed Abolition heretofore," he says among other things, "because we would preserve the Union, we must *a fortiori* now oppose slavery whenever, in our judgment, its continuance becomes incompatible with the maintenance of the Union, or of the nation as a free republican state."

Finally, the *World*, a New York organ of the diplomats of the Washington Cabinet, concludes one of its latest blustering articles against the Abolitionists with the words:

"On the day when it shall be decided that either slavery or the Union must go down, on that day sentence of death is passed on slavery. If the North cannot triumph *without* emancipation, it will triumph *with* emancipation."

## Karl Marx

### Address of the International Working Men's Association to Abraham Lincoln (November 1864)

Sir:

We congratulate the American people upon your re-election by a large majority. If resistance to the Slave Power was the reserved watchword of your first election, the triumphant war cry of your re-election is Death to Slavery.

From the commencement of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class. The contest for the territories which opened the dire epopee, was it not to decide whether the virgin soil of immense tracts should be wedded to the labor of the emigrant or prostituted by the tramp of the slave driver?

When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, "slavery" on the banner of Armed Revolt, when on the very spots where hardly a century ago the idea of one great Democratic Republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century; when on those very spots

counterrevolution, with systematic thoroughness, gloried in rescinding “the ideas entertained at the time of the formation of the old constitution”, and maintained slavery to be “a beneficent institution”, indeed, the old solution of the great problem of “the relation of capital to labor”, and cynically proclaimed property in man “the cornerstone of the new edifice” — then the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. Everywhere they bore therefore patiently the hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis, opposed enthusiastically the proslavery intervention of their betters — and, from most parts of Europe, contributed their quota of blood to the good cause.

While the workingmen, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war.

The workingmen of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Antislavery War will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.

Signed on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association, the Central Council:

Longmaid, Worley, Whitlock, Fox, Blackmore, Hartwell, Pidgeon, Lucraft, Weston, Dell, Nieass, Shaw, Lake, Buckley, Osbourne, Howell, Carter, Wheeler, Stainsby, Morgan, Grossmith, Dick, Denoual, Jourdain, Morrissot, Leroux, Bordage, Bocquet, Talandier, Dupont, L. Wolff, Aldovrandi, Lama, Solustri, Nusperli, Eccarius, Wolff, Lessner, Pfander, Lochner, Kaub, Bolleter, Rybczinski, Hansen, Schantzenbach, Smales, Cornelius, Petersen, Otto, Bagnagatti, Setacci;

George Odger, President of the Council; P.V. Lubez, Corresponding Secretary for France; Karl Marx, Corresponding Secretary for Germany; G.P. Fontana, Corresponding Secretary for Italy; J.E. Holtorp, Corresponding Secretary for Poland; H.F. Jung, Corresponding Secretary for Switzerland; William R. Cremer, Honorary General Secretary.

# George E. Novack

## Negro Slavery in North America

(October 1939)

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History is rich in examples of the revival of institutions appropriate to more primitive civilizations in advanced societies. Mankind is infinitely ingenious in adapting old cultural forms to new uses under the changed conditions of a new social order. Like a thrifty housewife, humanity hesitates to discard familiar acquisitions, however outmoded; it prefers to store them in attics or cellars in the hope of finding a use for them in the future. The history of economics, no less than the history of philosophy, religion, and politics, shows that such expectations are often realized.

The rise of chattel slavery in America is a striking case in point. Slave labor was the characteristic form of labor in ancient society and the economic foundation of the classical Greek and Roman cultures. Long after it had vanished from the centers of European society it was reborn in the New World at the dawn of capitalist civilization and continued to flourish in the bosom of the capitalist system for three centuries and a half. This reversion of the infant society of the New World to one of the most antiquated social institutions of the Old World, its longevity and its tenacity, makes chattel slavery the most conspicuous instance of the law of combined development in American history.

American society, the child of European capitalism, reproduced not only the features of its father but also of its more remote forebears. Almost every form of social relationship known to mankind sprang up on the soil of the New World, either in a pure form or in a medley of combinations. All the successive stages of civilization preceding the advent of capitalism, primitive communism, barbarism, slavery, feudalism, had a place in the sun until they withered away or were uprooted by the advance of capitalist forces. This varied profusion of social institutions makes the early history of America an extremely instructive textbook for the student of civilization.

Except for self-employed farming, chattel slavery was the earliest, the most widespread, and in the long run proved also to be the hardest of all these pre-capitalist methods of production in the field of agriculture. Wherever the European settled in America, slavery was sooner or later established. It made its way through the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and French possessions; it became the keystone in the structure of the richest English and French colonies; it constituted the foundation of the Southern Cotton Kingdom. In the course of three hundred and fifty years slavery thrust its roots so deeply into North American soil that it required the greatest revolution of the nineteenth century to destroy it.

The history of chattel slavery in North America must be divided into two distinct periods. The first period extended from the introduction of slavery into the New World by the Spaniards and Portuguese at the beginning of the sixteenth century through its development in the West Indies and North American coast to its decline in the British and French colonies at the end of the eighteenth century. The second period covers the rise, growth, and decay of the Cotton Kingdom in the United States during the first part of the nineteenth century.

These two epochs of chattel slavery were the offspring of two different stages in the development of capitalist society. In its initial phase American slavery was a collateral branch of commercial capitalism; in its final stage it was an integral part of industrial capitalism. We shall see that opposite forms of plantation life dominated the slave system of the two periods in North America.

### Slavery in the North American Colonies



*The Introduction of Slavery:* The first question that suggests itself in connection with chattel slavery is: how did such an historical anomaly come into being? Slavery in America is as old as its discovery. When Columbus set sail for "the Indies" in 1492, chattel slavery was a familiar institution in Spain and Portugal. The Spaniards were accustomed to enslave the peoples they conquered. The Moors, the African Negroes, and the American aborigines were all infidels, subject by divine law to serve Christian masters. Slavery did not however constitute the productive basis of Spanish society but existed alongside of it in the interstices of feudal life. Many Spanish vessels engaged in the slave trade and carried Negro slaves in their crews. It is not surprising to find that captain Christopher Columbus likewise had African slaves among his crew on his first voyage of discovery. It is even less surprising that within two years after reaching the West Indies he had five hundred of the natives seized and sent back to Spain to be sold on the auction block at Seville. Chattel slavery was one of the blessings brought, like syphilis, to the natives of the New World by their white conquerors.

The Spanish adventurers who followed Columbus took possession of the inhabitants of the West Indian islands, Mexico, and Peru, forcing them to labor in the mines and in the sugar fields. When the West Indians died off from overwork, starvation, and abuse until only a miserable few were left, large numbers of Negroes were transported from Spain and the West Coast of Africa to replace them.

From 1520 on, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, and English vessels poured Negroes in a never-ending stream into the West Indies. Sanctified by religion and legalized by the crown, the African slave trade became the most profitable of commercial enterprises. A Flemish favorite of Charles V of Spain obtained the exclusive right of importing four thousand Negroes annually into the West Indies and sold the patent for 25,000 ducats to some Genoese merchants who established the first regular trade route from Africa to America. In 1562 John Hawkins, an English sea-dog who scented the profits of the slave trade, sailed to Guinea with three ships and a hundred men provided by a company of gentlemen in London, where he procured at least three hundred Negroes and sold them in Hispaniola (Spanish Santo Domingo). The next year the first Negroes were imported into the English West Indies.

The slave traffic had already been flourishing for over a century when the first boatload of twenty Negroes was brought to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1620 by a Dutch vessel. Negro slavery made its way more slowly and gradually in the coastal colonies than in the West Indian islands.

There were not more than three hundred Negroes in Virginia thirty years after their introduction. By the close of the seventeenth century, however, Negro slaves began to displace white servants as the main body of the laboring population in Virginia and Maryland. Black slavery was soon transformed from a supplementary source of labor into the fundamental form of agricultural production.

Negroes were imported into South Carolina by way of the West Indies when it was discovered in 1694 that the lowlands were suitable for rice cultivation. Thereafter slavery spread as fast and as far throughout the English colonies as conditions permitted. Georgia was the only colony to oppose its introduction. So long as the philanthropic Oglethorpe governed the colony, slavery and rum were prohibited. When Georgia reverted to the Crown in 1752 the inhabitants were finally allowed to gratify their desires for black labor and hard liquor. On the eve of the Revolution there were over half a million Negroes among the three million inhabitants of the colonies. Less than forty thousand lived in the North; the rest were concentrated in the South. In five Southern colonies the Negroes equaled or outnumbered the whites. The reason was obvious. While the ownership of slaves in the North was a badge of aristocracy and wealth, in the South it was the necessary basis of society.

### **The Necessity of Chattel Slavery**

Why did Negro slavery strike such deep roots in the New World? Some historians attribute its persistence to physical factors. There is no doubt that favorable natural conditions facilitated the development of slavery. The tropical and semi-tropical regions of the earth have always been the motherlands of chattel slavery. This particular form of production thrives best upon an extremely rich soil which yields abundant crops with comparatively little cultivation by the crudest labor. Warm climates moreover enable the working force to labor without pause from one year's end to the next and to be sustained with a minimum of the necessities of life. The smaller the amount of labor required for the maintenance and reproduction of the actual producers, the greater is the surplus value

available for appropriation by the agricultural exploiter. Slavery cannot flourish without an inordinately high rate of surplus value since it is the costliest of all forms of labor.

Different natural conditions in the North as well as in the regions adjoining the plantation districts in the South led to the prevalence of quite different forms of agricultural labor. Slavery withered away in these parts, not through the indisposition of its proprietors to employ slave labor, but because the rocky soil and harsh climate prevented the cultivation of staple plantation crops. They were suitable only for raising corn, wheat, and other foodstuffs in which expensive slave labor could not compete with the small self-employed farmer or the hired laborer. Consequently, in those sections of the colonies, agriculture fell mainly into the hands of the small family farmers.

However great a role natural conditions played in the development of slavery, they did not constitute the decisive factors. Nature by itself only provided a more or less receptive seedbed for implanting this form of labor. For slavery to become the predominant method of colonial agriculture, certain social conditions had to be present. The main reasons for the growth of slavery were therefore to be found, not in the natural environment, but in the specific social and economic problems confronting the colonial planters.

They proposed to grow sugar, tobacco, and rice for commercial export to Europe. The large-scale agricultural operations required for cultivating these crops cannot be carried on by solitary laborers. They demanded an associated working force of considerable proportions. How were such working forces to be procured in the colonies where land was plentiful but labor lacking?

The labor problem was the most serious of all problems for the colonial planter. Some form of bondage was necessary to bring workers to the new lands and to keep them working thereafter for their masters. The colonizers grasped at any kind of labor within reach. Negro slavery was neither the first nor the only form of servitude in North America; it was preceded by Indian and white slavery.

The sparse native Indian population proved no solution. The English colonists tried to enslave the North American Indians in the same manner as the Spaniards enslaved the natives of West Indies, Mexico, and Peru. When they discovered that the Indians were either not numerous enough or, like certain African tribes, would not submit to slavery but sickened and died in captivity, they had little further use for them. They proceeded either to slaughter them on the spot or to drive them westward.

At first the landed proprietors relied upon the importation of white bondsmen from the mother country. England and the continent were combed for servants to be sent to America.

Some of these indentured servants came of their own accord, voluntarily agreeing to serve their masters for a certain term of years, usually four to seven, in return for their passage. Many others, especially German serfs, were sold by their lords to the slave merchants and ship-owners. In addition the overflowing prisons of England were emptied of their inmates and the convicts brought to America to be sold into servitude for terms ranging from four to fourteen years.

The Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the middle of the seventeenth century made slaves as well as subjects of the Irish people. Over one hundred thousand men, women, and children were seized by the English troops and shipped over to the West Indies where they were sold into slavery upon the tobacco plantations. In *The Reconquest of Ireland* James Connolly quotes the following instance of the methods used.

“Captain John Vernon was employed by the Commissioners for Ireland to England, and contracted in their behalf with Mr. David Sellick and the Leader under his hand to supply them with two hundred and fifty women of the Irish nation, above twelve years and under the age of forty-five, also three hundred men above twelve years and under fifty, to be found in the country within twenty miles of Cork, Youghal and Kinsale, Waterford and Wexford, to transport them into New England.”

This British firm alone was responsible for shipping over 6,400 girls and boys...

As a result of the insistent demands of the planters for labor, the servant trade took on most of the horrible features of the slave trade. Gangs of kidnappers roamed the streets of English seaports and combed the highways and byways of Britain and Ireland for raw material. In the rapacious search for redemptioners the homes of the poor were invaded. Where promises could not persuade, compulsion was brought into play. Husbands were torn from their wives, fathers from their families, children from their parents. Boys and girls were sold by parents or guardians; unwanted dependents by their relatives; serfs by their lords—and all this human cargo was shipped to America to be sold to the highest bidder.

Thus the bulk of the white working population of the English colonies was composed of bondsmen and criminals, who had been cajoled or coerced into emigration and had to pass through years of bondage before they could call themselves free. These people and their children became the hunters, trappers, farmers, artisans, mechanics, and even the planters and merchants, who were later to form the ranks of the revolutionary forces against the mother country.

These white bondsmen however provided neither a sufficient nor a satisfactory supply of labor. They could not be kept in a permanent condition of enslavement. Unless they were marked or branded, if they ran away they could not readily be distinguished from their free fellows or their masters. As production expanded, it became increasingly urgent to find new, more abundant, and more dependable sources of labor.

The Negro slave trade came to the planter's rescue. Negroes could be purchased at reasonable prices and brought in unlimited numbers from the African coasts. They were accustomed to tropical climates and could be worked in such miasmatic, malaria-breeding swamplands as those of South Carolina. They were gregarious, prolific, and, once domesticated, were willing to breed in captivity. By keeping the Negroes scattered, ignorant, and terrorized, the slave-owners could keep them in perpetual subjection and prevent them from escaping with impunity. The color of the black man's skin became the sign of servitude, enabling the white man to keep the Slave yoke fixed firmly on his shoulders.

The profits of the slave trade were another potent factor in the extension of Negro slavery. The traffic in slaves became too lucrative an enterprise to remain in private hands. The sovereigns of Spain and England contended with each other for the lion's share of the trade to fill the royal treasuries. The possession of the slave trade was one of the richest prizes at stake in the War of the Spanish Succession. The Treaty of Utrecht which concluded the war in 1713 awarded a monopoly of the slave trade to England. Their majesties organized a company for carrying on the traffic: one quarter of the stock was taken by Philip of Spain; another by Queen Anne of England; and the remaining half was divided amongst her subjects. Thus the sovereigns of Spain and England became the largest slave merchants in the world.

The slave trade became a cornerstone of Anglo-American commerce. Many fortunes in Old and New England were derived from the traffic. This trade enjoyed the special protection of the Crown whose agents persistently vetoed the efforts of colonial legislatures to abolish or restrict it. It is estimated that from 1713 to 1780 over twenty thousand slaves were carried annually to America by British and American ships. In 1792 there were 132 ships engaged in the slave trade in Liverpool alone.

How economic necessity and political pressure combined to impose slavery upon the colonial upper classes is explained in the following extract from a letter written in 1757 by Peter Fontaine, a Huguenot emigrant to Virginia, to a friend across the Atlantic:

“The Negroes are enslaved by the Negroes themselves before they are purchased by the masters of the ships who bring them here. It is to be sure at our choice whether we buy them or not, so this is our crime, folly, or whatever you please to call it. But our Assembly, foreseeing the ill consequences of importing such numbers amongst us, hath often attempted to lay a duty upon them which would amount to a prohibition, such as ten or twenty pounds a head, but no governor dare pass such a law, having instructions to the contrary from the Board of Trade at home. By this means they are forced upon us, whether we will or not. This plainly shows the African Company hath the advantage of the colonies, and may do as it pleases with the ministry...

“To live in Virginia without slaves is morally impossible. Before our troubles, you could not hire a servant or slave for love or money, so that unless robust enough to cut wood, to go to mill, to work at the hoe, &c., you

must starve or board in some family where they both fleece and half starve you. There is no set price upon corn, wheat, and provisions, so they take advantage of the necessities of strangers, who are thus obliged to purchase some slaves and land. This of course draws us all into the original sin and curse of the country of purchasing slaves, and this is the reason we have no merchants, traders, or artifices of any sort here but what become planters in a short time.

“A common laborer, white or black, if you can be so favored as to hire one, is a shilling sterling or fifteen pence currency per day; a bungling carpenter two shillings or two shillings and sixpence per day; besides diet and lodging. That is, for a lazy fellow to get wood and water, \$19.16, current per annum; add to this seven or eight pounds more and you have a slave for life.”

“It seems probable,” says Charles Beard in *The Rise of American Civilization*, “that at least half of the immigrants into America before the Revolution, certainly outside New England, were either indentured servants or Negro slaves.”

The original foundations of American society rested not upon free but upon slave and semi-servile labor, both white and black.

# George E. Novack

## The Colonial Plantation System

(December 1939)

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In the colonial period, before the rise of large-scale industry, slavery existed in two different economic forms in the Western world, one representing its past, the other its future. The first was the patriarchal form in which it had flourished from time immemorial. The patriarchal plantations were largely self-sustained, retaining many features of natural economy. Production was divided into two parts, one devoted to the cultivation of such cash crops as tobacco, corn, hemp, etc.; the other to the needs of home consumption.

The plantation system developed along these lines in the Virginia and Maryland colonies. The average estate was relatively small, employing from five to twenty hands, part of whom were likely to be white redemptioners. Blacks and whites worked together in the fields without insurmountable barriers or deep antagonisms between them. Relations between masters and slaves, with notable exceptions, had a paternal character. The slaveowner was not an absentee landlord who entrusted his estate to the supervision of an overseer and was interested solely in the maximum amount of profit to be gained from his operations. He lived upon his plantation the year round and regarded it as his home.

Field hands were often indulgently treated. Negro servants, who replaced white servants in the household as well as in the field, were frequently on intimate and trusted terms with the master and his family, remained in the same family generation after generation, and were regarded as subordinate members of the household.

Such plantations raised their own food, wove their own cloth, built their own houses. Agriculture for domestic use was sometimes supplemented by domestic manufacture. George Washington's estate, for example, contained a weaving establishment. Other planters owned spinning and weaving factories employing not only slave labor but white servants on a wage-labor basis.

In South Carolina and Georgia the plantation system developed according to a different pattern. There chattel slavery lost its patriarchal characteristics and became transformed into a purely commercial system of exploitation based upon the production of a single money crop. The typical rice and indigo plantations in the coastal regions were of large size, employing about thirty slaves working under a white taskmaster. The proprietors were either absentee owners living in Charleston, Savannah, or Jamaica who came to inspect the estates several times a year or who lived only part of the year upon their plantations owing to the prevalence of malaria in the hot months. South Carolina and Georgia's economy was so utterly dependent upon slave labor that they became the strongholds of the slave system in the English colonies on the mainland.

Until the rise of the Cotton Kingdom, the capitalist plantation system in the English colonies was perfected on the largest scale in Jamaica. Economically considered, the whole island was converted into one vast plantation devoted to the cultivation of sugar cane and the making of sugar which was then shipped overseas for sale. The individual plantations, carved in large sections out of the fertile soil, were in many cases owned by absentee landlords resident in England and managed by hired superintendents. They were extremely productive and worked entirely by slave labor.

"The average unit of industry in the Jamaican sugar fields came to be a plantation with a total of nearly two hundred Negroes, of whom more than half were workers in the field gangs," writes Ulrich B. Phillips in his introduction to the first volume of *The Documentary History of American Industrial Society*.

“The laborers were strictly classified and worked in squads under close and energetic supervision to near the maximum of their muscular ability. The routine was thoroughly systematic, and the system as efficient on the whole as could well be, where the directors were so few and the Negroes so many and so little removed from the status of African savagery. The Jamaican units were on the average the largest in all the history of plantation industry.”

The concentration of production upon one commercial staple combined with the exclusive use of slave labor give rise to the social and economic consequences that were later to prevail in the Cotton Kingdom. The small farmers who had originally populated the island were pushed out and gradually disappeared. The inhabitants came to be divided into two absolutely opposed classes: the planters and their agents on top and the Negro slaves on the bottom. A sprinkling of merchants and mechanics between them catered to the needs of the plantation owners. The sugar lords were absolute rulers of the island, exploiting it for their exclusive benefit and representing it at Westminster.

This type of chattel slavery prefigured the future and was to predominate within the Southern Cotton Kingdom. Except for the far South, slavery was a decaying institution in the English coastal colonies at the time of the Revolution. The decline in the value of tobacco compelled many planters to turn to the raising of other crops in which slave labor could not profitably compete with free labor. Finding their slaves to be an economic liability, some masters entertained ideas of emancipation. The slave system began to disintegrate, giving way here and there to tenant farming, share-cropping, and even wage-labor.

Virginia and Maryland were then among the leading centers of abolition sentiment in the colonies. Some of the wealthiest and most influential planters in the Old Dominion, such as Washington and Jefferson, advocated the abolition of slavery and the restriction of the slave trade. Henry Laurens of South Carolina, President of the Continental Congress, who owned slaves worth twenty thousand pounds, wrote his son in 1776 that he abhorred slavery and was devising means for manumitting his chattels. But most slaveholders, especially those in Georgia and South Carolina where rice and hemp could not be grown without slaves, flatly opposed any restrictions upon the trade which would prevent them from buying the labor they needed. They found support among Northern merchants who benefited from the slave traffic.

In the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had inserted an indictment of George III for promoting and protecting the slave trade against colonial protests. But, he tells us,

“... the clause, reprobating the enslaving of the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who, on the contrary, still wished to continue it. Our Northern brethren, also, I believe, felt a little tender under those censures; for though their people had very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others.”

The Revolutionary War impressed the dangers of slavery upon the minds of the colonists. Aroused by proclamations from royal governors and military commanders promising them freedom, thousands of Negroes escaped to the British camps and garrisons; while the slave owners, fearful of insurrection and the safety of their property and families, were unable or unwilling to serve in the Continental armies. New England, with a population less numerous than that of Virginia, Carolina, and Georgia, provided more than twice as many troops to the revolutionary forces. The South was easily conquered by the redcoats who were defeated and expelled from New England at the beginning of the war.

Although the Revolution had been proclaimed and fought in the name of liberty and equality, it brought little immediate alteration in the status of the mass of Negroes who lived in the South. Only the few thousands in the North benefited from the liberating legislation of that period. The state constitution of Massachusetts led the way by abolishing slavery in 1780; Pennsylvania passed an act of gradual emancipation the same year; in the succeeding years other Northern states illegalized slavery within their borders. But not for a half century after the Declaration of Independence, in 1826, was slavery legally abolished in New York.

When the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in secret conclave at Philadelphia to form the Union, the question of the abolition of slavery was not even placed upon the agenda. The discussions concerning

slavery revolved around those issues pertaining to the interests of the Southern planters and Northern capitalists whose representatives composed the Convention. The questions in dispute concerned the slave trade, the use of slaves as a basis for taxation and representation, and the protective tariff.

In return for the protective tariff granted to the capitalists, the delegates from South Carolina and Georgia, whose platform was “No Slave Trade—No Union,” were granted a twenty-year extension of the slave-trade, a fugitive slave law, and a provision allowing three-fifths of the slaves to be counted as a basis for taxation and political representation.

The slaveholders proved powerful enough to obtain a Constitution that not only protected their peculiar institution but even erected additional legal safeguards around it. General Charles C. Pinckney, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, reported with satisfaction to the South Carolina ratification convention that:

“By this settlement, we have secured an unlimited importation of Negroes for twenty years. Nor is it declared when that importation shall be stopped; it may be continued. We have a right to recover our slaves in whatever part of America they may take refuge. In short, considering all circumstances, we have made the best terms for the security of this species of property it was in our power to make. We would have made better if we could; but, on the whole, I do not think them bad.”

The Constitution, then, was a slaveholder’s document; the United States was founded upon slavery. Some of the founding fathers recognized that slavery was the chief crack in the cornerstone of the new Republic, a crack which in time might widen to a fissure capable of splitting the union apart. Jefferson prophetically warned the slaveholders that they would one day have to choose between emancipation or their own destruction. But before Jefferson’s prophecy was fulfilled, chattel slavery was to flourish more luxuriantly than ever in North America and spread beyond the Mississippi to Texas. It was to make Cotton king of American economy and the cotton barons autocrats of the nation; and it was ultimately to flower in that anachronistic Southern culture which proclaimed slavery to be “a perfect good,” eternally ordained and sanctified by the laws of God, Justice, History, and Mankind.



