

**LABOR SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL ORDERS:
A STUDY OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA**

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Servitude was a common practice in England when the first 104 settlers reached Virginia in 1607. One of the more common types of English servitude was that of the apprenticeship, an arrangement in which a young man contracted with a craftsman, through an indenture, for a specific period of service. During this time, the apprentice was supported financially while learning a skilled trade, but bound to work for his benefactor for a specified period of time after his training had ended until his debt had been repaid. For many a young man, this practice came to be a means of escaping the deplorable economic, political, and religious conditions in England, while supplying the needed labor for the developing colonies. Over time, as labor intensive tobacco plantations became more financially profitable, indentured servitude developed into a simple means of supplying agricultural laborers, not as a means intended to teach a craft. ¹

In the early colonial period, as a class, blacks were generally treated as indentured servants, however, over time, their status evolved into that of property. Some Africans were brought directly to the colonies as victims of the "*slave trade*," while others were unfortunate victims of the evolution of indentured servitude into slavery, a process that would occur over many years. The seed of slavery took root in the practice of indentured servitude in early Colonial Virginia, where early statutes of that colony transformed the relationship of apprenticeship

¹ McIlwaine, H.R., ed. Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-32, 1670-1676, With Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, Now Lost, (Richmond, VA, 1924), pg 117.

into that of indentured servitude. As a result, English servants were then bought and sold freely, used as gambling stakes, transferred by will, and even taken by the Sheriff in satisfaction of a master's debt. Although it was common for a servant in England to have his services transferred from one master to another sometime during his term of servitude, the idea of selling servants en masse, was shocking, even to some early seventeenth century Virginians. Captain John Smith denounced the practice as the "*pride, covetousness, extortion, and oppression*" of men who sold "*even men, women, and children for who will give most.*" ²

In 1619, John Rolfe wrote that the "*buying and selling [of] men and boies*" was "*held in England a thing most intolerable.*" ³ In 1625, Thomas Weston even refused to carry servants in his ship from Canada to Virginia because "*servants were sold heere upp and down like horses, and therefore he held it not unlawful to carie any*" ⁴ Nonetheless, poor English men and women were seen as a steady supply for the expanding demand for labor in Virginia's growing tobacco economy. Many saw few years of labor as an exchange for transportation to the New World to escape the dismal living conditions in England as a good deal.

There is little evidence to clearly show the evolution of slavery from indentured servitude during the first half of the seventeenth century. There were, however, many important court decisions and events that allowed the English to

² Arber, Edward ed. Travel and Works of Captain John Smith, President of Virginia and Admiral of New England, 1580-1631 (Edinburg: John Grant, 1910) pg. 618.

⁹ Arber, Travel and Works of Captain John Smith, pg 542.

⁴ McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia pg. 82.

adapt their civil laws to accommodate slavery. ⁵ According to sporadic records, the first Africans recorded in Virginia arrived on a Dutch ship off Point Comfort (today Hampton, Virginia), in August 1619. Two officials from Jamestown, Governor George Yeardley and cape merchant, Abraham Piersey, purchased them in exchange for needed food. ⁶ Beyond this, there is very little information available which would tell us who these Africans were, or how they were subsequently treated. However, a few years later, the census of 1624-25, lists all twenty-three (23) black residents of Virginia as servants, including those of Yeardley and Peirse. The consensus among historians seems to be that the early black immigrants to Virginia were held as indentured servants, not as slaves.

Court records give historians an interesting glimpse into the life of the black indentured servant in seventeenth century Virginia. There were a few, like Anthony Johnson, who were not only given their freedom, but also eventually became landowners, and owned servants of their own. There are several cases, some dating as late as 1680, where black servants brought their masters to court and won suits that limited their indentures, or in a few cases, even won their freedom. From these cases, historians have concluded that lifetime servitude began for some blacks around the middle of the seventeenth century. The earliest recorded case of enslavement is July, 1640, when three (3) indentured servants, two (2) of which were white, and one black, were tried by the General

⁵ Billings, Warren, "The Laws of Servants and Slaves in 17th Century Virginia" Magazine of Historical Biography, Vol. 99, January, 1991) pgs. 54-55. 54-55.

¹² Kingsbury, Susan Myra, A.M. Ph.D. Records of the Virginia Company of London, Vol. 11, pg 243.

Court for running away. The white servants received punishments, adding four (4) years to their terms, while the black servant (John Punch) was sentenced to serve his master for the rest of his life. 7 In another case in 1654, John Casor, a black servant, filed suit against his master Anthony Johnson, a free black landowner. Johnson responded by claiming that he had "*ye Negro for his life*" and won the case, thus extending Casor's term to a life indenture. 8

Historians agree that slavery in Virginia began through usage and custom, as one by one, the terms of black indentured servants were extended to life. Once the practice was established, and the demand for labor increased, the slave trade took over and slavery became a major institution in Colonial America. By the 1660s, the law, through statutes passed by the General Assembly at Jamestown, recognized slavery. The laws that developed over the following three (3) decades reveal how it became increasingly difficult for black servants or slaves to gain their freedom. By 1683, eighteen (18) percent of Virginia's bondsmen were slaves, while in just twenty five (25) years later, this proportion had increased to forty (40) percent. 9 By the close of the seventeenth century, slavery was the norm for all Africans coming to the tobacco colony of Virginia. With its roots firmly planted at Jamestown, slavery in Virginia began gradually through practice and custom, and finally found its legitimization through law.

7 Decisions of the General Court, Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, (Vol. IV, 1898), pg. 236.

8 Foner, Philip S., History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, (Greenwood Press, Norwich, CT 1975) pg. 191.

9 Toppin, Edgar A., A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528, (David McKay Company, New York, NY., 1969) pg, 41.

The Slave Trade

Every social group in Colonial America regarded the black man inferior. Slaves were taught only the simplest skills of farming, building, and manufacturing. As the colonies grew, the demand for slaves grew causing slave traders to look for new sources of supply. Many blacks that became slaves were captured by enemy tribes in central and western Africa, forced to march long distances over land, and sold to European slave traders at African ports. To prevent escape, the captives were usually shackled with iron collars, and linked together by chains. Many did not survive the trip to the African seaport; and for those who did, only the strongest and healthy were selected by European slave buyers for transport to the New World. Upon being selected, the captives were branded and packed into slave ships for transport to North America. This journey came to be known as the "*Middle Passage*", and would last for weeks. Conditions were often so terrible that some jumped overboard, while others suffered and died of disease, and spoiled food. On average, up to one-third of the slaves on any ship would not survive the trip across the Atlantic. The death rate was so extreme that sharks could be seen trailing along behind the ships. Upon arrival in the New World, the slaves were first taken to the West Indies where they were "*seasoned*" or broken in by overseers to increase their value, before they were imported into the colonies. Through all of this, the slave traders and colonial shipping companies (many from northern states) realized enormous profits.

By the late 1760s, the English alone had shipped 3 million slaves to America, add to that number 250,000 which had died during the journey or been

thrown overboard. Due to the economic success of the slave trade, slavery gained official sanction by the British government in 1770 when it granted an annual subsidy of 10,000 pounds sterling to the African Company and its successor, the Regulated Company. The purpose of this subsidy was to help maintain the British forts and posts in Africa in support of the slave trade. If there was any doubt as to the official position of the crown in this regard it was washed away in 1770 when King George III prohibited the Governor of Virginia to “*assent to any law by which the importation of slaves should be in any respect prohibited or obstructed.*”¹⁰ This official sanction of slavery continued until Parliament officially ended the trafficking in humans in March 1807.¹¹

The Use of Slave Labor In the Colonies

Eighteenth century slavery in America was not confined to the South. By the 1770s about 12,000 slaves lived in New England, where farms were usually small, and unable to economically support as many slaves as the larger plantations of the South. For this reason, most slaves living there worked as household servants for wealthy families, while others worked as farm laborers, lumberjacks, carpenters, barrel-makers, blacksmiths etc. Contrary to their brethren in the South, slaves in New England held some political rights. They could buy and own property and they had the right to trial by jury. They could attend church as long as they sat in slave pews, but could not become church members since membership included certain political rights, e.g., the right to

¹⁰ Durant, Will and Ariel, The History of Civilization: Rousseau and Revolution, (Vol. X, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY., 1976) pg. 732.

¹¹ Durant, Will and Ariel, The History of Civilization: The Age of Napoleon, (Vol. XI, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY., 1995) pg. 526.

vote, hold office etc. As a matter of practice, New Englanders regarded their slaves as adopted children, and in rare instances they were taught to read and write, even though it was against the law in most states. Although the slaves in New England had it much better than their counterparts in the South, most very much resented their condition.

In the Middle Colonies, e.g., New York, (except for New York City) Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, slavery was not a common practice. The relatively small number of slaves in the Middle Colonies was small, maybe reaching no more than 35,000. In New York, household slaves were strictly separated from whites, and reports of violence between white owners and slaves were common. In Pennsylvania, and parts of New Jersey, influential Quakers challenged the morality of slave labor as well as its usefulness, and began to speak out against it.

In the Southern colonies, slavery was a completely different matter. Of the 300,000 to 400,000 slaves who lived in North America in 1765, the vast majority lived in the Southern colonies. They labored under almost indescribable conditions on tobacco, sugar and rice plantations making an enormous contribution to the economic development of the South. As did the Portuguese in Brazil, at first Southern planters tried to enslave the Indians, and when that didn't work they tried white indentured servants. But white indentured servants were hard to keep, as the work was backbreaking and the heat of the cotton and/or rice fields was intolerable, and because they were white, they could easily run away and assimilate into the community. In addition, blacks withstood the

conditions better, and for this reason, became a more dependable source of labor. It was for this reason that the demand that supported the slave trade escalated, and as a result, slavery grew rapidly in the southern colonies.

A few freed slaves lived in every colony, as descendants of early indentured servants often inherited their freedom. As a matter of law, children of a white mother regardless of the father's race were free. Occasionally, masters would free a slave for years of faithful service. Once freed, most blacks earned their living as skilled workers, some owned small farms and some even owned businesses. Although they were considered free, no black could vote in any colony, except for a short period of time in North Carolina. In short, blacks were regarded as a class apart whether slave or free. Over a four-year period from 1735 to 1739, eleven thousand Africans passed through Sullivan's Island.¹²

Slavery and the Culture of the South

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the planter class in the South was enjoying one of the few times in American History when agriculture was actually on the rise. As a class, the planter was heir to the prestige of the English country gentleman, and could proclaim, with wide approval, the superiority of his vocation. To the Southern planter there was something special about tilling the land; something that was fundamental to the human condition, making a unique contribution to the character and development of a sound social order. Thomas Jefferson spoke of "*those who labor in the earth*" as the "*chosen people of God...whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and*

¹² Johnson, Charles and Smith, Patricia, *Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1998. Pg. 94.

genuine virtue.” Jefferson, as did many of the other founders of the republic were certain that democratic government could endure only so long as the great majority of its people were farmers. 13

Interestingly, modern capitalism seemed to support this view, as it served to create markets in an environment of explosive growth, allowing for the acquisition and speculation in new lands, as well as the exploitation of natural resources, and the enslavement black men for private gain. No longer was the Southern planter uninterested in profits. Now he sought to cling to the doctrine of *laissez faire*, insisting that the unfettered natural law alone could give the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers of people.

During this time, those who planted tobacco and rice in Virginia and the Carolinas appeared to prosper most. The plantation, with its great house, its quarters, its gardens, and its far-flung expanse of lands were a sure indication of wealth, and life on the plantation was seen as an icon for culture and refinement. 14 But, over time, this prosperity proved to be more apparent than real. Nineteenth century farming techniques had badly depleted the soil and wasted other resources, both physical and human. Cultivation was shallow, and heavy rains cut rolling hills into deep gullies. Pestilence forced the abandonment of wasted lands, as pioneer farmers pushed back the frontier in a constant search for new lands holding better prospects for the future. In a short time weeds, briars, and pines replaced the staples, which had grown on the abandoned lands, and the old fields were once again assimilated back into the landscape. After a

13 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1957., pg. 40.

time, wild animals returned to establish themselves in areas from which they had been driven a century earlier.

Under these conditions, the weak and least efficient farmers sank into poverty, while the more energetic and optimistic packed their belongings and headed west. By 1830, nearly one-third of those born in Maryland and Virginia were living in other states, while estates such as Mount Vernon, which had been tended by the hands of George Washington, and Monticello by the hands of Thomas Jefferson laid in economic ruin. Some blamed the soils for their troubles, but most focused their blame on the policies of government, which in colonial days, tended to restrict markets, over tax, and especially after the revolution, ignore the interests of the common farmer. 15

Over the next three decades there were to only brief periods of relief, i.e., Europe's call for more food amidst the French Revolution. But, for the most part, the peace, which followed the War of 1812, brought with it a crash in farm prices which signaled the end to the old agricultural era which had existed for a century and a half. 16

The South and Industrialism

Much of the South's prevalent defensive-aggressive attitude in the 1850s was due in part, to a sense of economic subordination to the North. The census of 1850 alarmed a nation, which had long equated growth with progress. During the preceding decade, population growth in the North (free states) had exceeded that of the South (slave states) by 20 percent, attributed by many to the lack of

14 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 40.

15 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 41.

economic opportunity in the South. Nearly three times the number of people born in slave states had migrated to the free states than the reverse, while seven-eighths of all foreign immigrants settled in the North where jobs were plentiful and there was no competition from slave labor. 17

In addition to the shifting demographics, the transportation revolution, an important precursor to American industrialism, opened distant markets, and restructured the emerging American economy, allowing farmers primarily, the opportunity to produce a surplus, which could be sold at a profit into distant markets. No longer was the producer producing only for his own consumption.

As in the case of the industrialization of nearly a half-century later, the development of transportation was not equally proportioned between the North and South. By 1850 only 14 percent of canal mileage ran through slave states. In 1840, the South had 44 percent of the country's rail mileage, while by 1850, the escalation of industrialization in the North had reduced the South's share to 26 percent. Even more discouraging to the Southern economy were the data on industrial production. While the slave states could boast in 1840 of having 42 percent of the population, only 18 percent of total American manufacturing capacity came from the South, representing a decline of 20 percent.

The only economic aspect of the 1850 census favoring the South was the strong numbers on agriculture. By 1850, cotton prices had climbed to nearly double those of 1840s of 5.5 cents per pound. The problem in these numbers for Southern industrialists was that the states which produced cotton, consumed less

16 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 42.

than 5 percent of the total crop. Of that portion of the cotton crop not consumed domestically, 70 percent was exported overseas, while the remainder went to mills in the North where the value was added by manufacture into cloth equaled the price of the raw cotton to the producer. This situation was worsened by the fact that the South imported two-thirds of its clothing and other manufactured goods from the North or from Europe, creating a severe trade deficit.

This all began to resemble the mercantilism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which built England and France into economic superpowers at the expense of their colonies, one of which was in North America. To the mercantilist, the colonies represented an endless supply of low cost raw materials as well as markets for their manufactured goods. This is exactly the relationship, which developed between the American South and its northern neighbors. As the balance of trade between the two regions worsened, so did the atmosphere of conflict. Thus the stage was set for the eventual outbreak of armed conflict, which would ultimately be set in motion by many of the same economic issues which had brought about the American Revolution.

Considering the foregoing, it is easy to understand why the South came to resent what at least one southerner referred to as a “*degrading vassalage*” to the North. Between 1846-50, the attitudes and resentments of the people of the South spread, aggravated, and widened the sectional crisis. Many Southerners felt more economically enslaved than their Negroes, as Northern interests controlled nearly all commerce in the South. Slaves wore clothes manufactured

17 McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, Oxford University Press, London and New York, NY, pg. 91.

in the North, worked with hoes, plows, and other equipment, all manufactured in the North. The slaveholder was dressed in clothes made in the North, rode in a saddle made in the North, read Northern books, and loaded his produce on Northern ships for transportation to markets in the North.

This economic “*degrading vassalage*” to the North became an almost constant litany during the sectional crisis of 1846-51. As declared by one southern newspaper,

“Yankees denounce and abuse slavery and slaveholders,yet we purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North....Our slaves are clothed with northern manufactured goods, and work with northern hoes, plows, and other farm tools.....the slaveholder dresses in northern goods, rides in a northern saddle...reads northern books...in northern vessels his products are carried to market....and on northern paper, with a northern pen, with northern ink he resolves and re-resolves in regard to his rights.”
18

This economic subordination, coupled with Northern attacks on slavery, an institution which had become such an important part of the Southern culture and self-identification, only widened the atmosphere of conflict.

Over the years, contemporaries as well as historians have offered several explanations for the failure to industrialize the economies of the slave states. Adam Smith was the first of the “*classical economists*” to argue that free labor was more efficient than slave labor because the free worker was stimulated to produce by the fear of want that his failure to work would bring upon himself, as well as an overall desire for a better life. According to Smith, “*a slave can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labor as little as possible.*” Northern opponents of slavery agreed with Smith’s thesis. According to Horace Greeley,

18 McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, pg. 92.

“enslave a man and you destroy his ambition, his enterprise, and his capacity. In the constitution of human nature, the desire of bettering one’s condition is the mainspring of effort.” Frederick Law Olmsted, a Northern journalist and landscape architect, made three extensive trips throughout the South and observed that the subsistence level at which many slaves as well as “*poor whites*” lived served to discourage the development of markets for consumer goods. A prerequisite to the development of a viable manufacturing sector. 19

While these arguments certainly had merit, they fail to fully explain the situation. The successful employment of slaves as well as white workers in southern textile mills, as well as iron foundries such as the Tredegar Works in Richmond, and other industries, demonstrate the potential for industrialization on a greater scale. The argument of a lack of local markets for manufactured goods simply did not stand up when one considered the significant southern demand for an entire range of northern goods. This caused several prominent economists to argue that a market existed in the South for manufactured goods it only had to be exploited. 20

Probably a better explanation of the lack of industrialization in the South was the lack of capital rather than the deficiencies of labor. According to the census of 1860, there was an abundance of capital in the South. In fact, the average white male in the South was nearly twice as wealthy as the average white man in the North. The problem was, most of this wealth was invested in land and slaves. In his book *“Marching Through Georgia”* Lee Kennett supports

19 McPherson, James M., *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, pg. 96.

20 McPherson, James M., *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, pg. 97.

this argument with the observation that most of the South's capital was tied up in nonliquid forms, i.e., land and slaves. According to the 1860 census 44% of the population of Georgia which were black also constituted 45% of its wealth. The total value of slaves in Georgia in 1860 was a little over three hundred million dollars, making them the state's most valuable property, and worth twice the value of the land they tilled. 21 While the slave states possessed 30% of the national wealth, they had only 12% of circulating currency, and 21% of the banking assets. Much of this was brought on by the cotton embargo, which drastically affected the Southern economy during 1861-62. Instead of having the money to invest in Confederate bonds, etc., most planters were deeply in debt, mostly directly or indirectly to northern banks. 22

A Northerner described the investment cycle of the southern economy as follows: "*To sell cotton in order to buy Negroes – to make more cotton to buy more Negroes, 'ad infinitum,' is the aim and direct tendency of all the operations of the thorough going cotton planter.*" 23 Some economists and historians have questioned if this preference for the reinvestment in slaves was economically rational? Other historians, i.e., Ulrich B. Phillips have answered this question in the negative, arguing that plantation agriculture was becoming decreasingly profitable, and was being preserved by southern whites more for cultural reasons than economics. Other economic historians have argued that the slave driven agricultural economy of the nineteenth century yielded as great a return on

21 Kennett, Lee, Marching Through Georgia: The Story of Soldiers and Civilians During Sherman's Campaign, Harper Collins, New York, NY 1995, pg. 20.

22 Kennett, Lee, Marching Through Georgia, pg. 20.

23 McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, pg. 97.

capital as any potential alternative investments. Still others argue that investments in railroads and mills might have yielded higher returns than agriculture, and that cotton was living on borrowed time in a nearly saturated market. But without doubt, whatever the rationality of the southern planter to reinvest his profits in agriculture, in the end, this decision had the effect of collectively inhibiting industrialism in the South. 24

Thus, plenty of evidence points to the agrarian value system as an important impediment to the region's lack of industrialization. By the mid nineteenth century, many still embraced the Jeffersonian thought that those who labored in the earth were God's chosen people. The existence of this conviction in the created a cultural climate, which simply was not supportive of industrialization. Those who defended slavery drew contrast between the slave's more favorable condition on the plantation as opposed to the misery of the wage slave in the North. To the southern agrarian, a large plantation and plenty of Negroes were the ultimate ambition of every young man. Commerce and trade were best suited for Yankees, not for gentlemen. 25

Some planters did invest in railroads and factories, and for those who did, their enterprises experienced growth during the 1850s. But overall, the trend during this period was the consolidation of investment in land and slaves. While per capita wealth in the south rose 62 percent from 1850 to 1860, the average price of slaves increased 70 percent and the value per acre of tillable land 72 percent, while per capita southern investment in manufacturing increased only 39

24 McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, pg. 98.

25 McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, pg. 99.

percent. In other words, southerners had a larger portion of their capital invested in land and slaves in 1860 than in 1850.

Slavery and Social Order

Many ante-bellum Southerners were firmly convinced that the South was a superior culture, and used the institution of slavery to support their argument. In an editorial, the Charleston Mercury pointed to fundamental differences between the peoples of the North and South. According to the article, the peoples of both regions were essentially “*imbued with the blood of England, but none the less were of a somewhat dissimilar stock. Each derived its mental state and tone of thought from a different class of society and a different view of politics.*” This view cast New Englanders, as well as most other Northerners in the character of the early Puritan movement, while the more desirable Cavalier spirit dominated the Southern way of life. The editorialist goes on to picture Northerners as a people possessed of a “*hard practical shrewdness*” with an “*utter disregard of persons,*” a “*stern proscriptive disposition,*” and a “*cold calculation of means to ends.*” He went on to describe them as “*grasping and unyielding in the advancement of their pecuniary and political advantages,*” and their statesmen always working to the most beneficial ends for their section of the country. 26

Southerners had always been willing to sacrifice personal material interests for the general welfare, and as a result, had become victims of northern treachery. The natural continuation of this argument was that the North and the

26 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 299.

South were two different and independent nations, as distinct as the peoples of England and France. 27

Obviously, a southern superiority was implicit in these differences. An editorial writer for the Richmond Enquirer contrasted the two societies as one being like “*a fine country gentleman who lives in the open air ten hours each day tending the fields of his plantation, who rides a high-mettled horse as if it were a part of him, follows the fox hounds despite the presence of fences and ditches, downing a flying partridge with each barrel, and at the end of the day returns to the comforts of his home without meanness or being of rude character.*” On the other hand, this same writer characterizes the New York gentleman as “*one who spends the winters in his Parisian house on Fifth Avenue, and the summers at Newport or Saratoga, whose greatest feat of strength and skill is to drive a horse on a smooth road, who copies European luxury, European manners and European morals, and makes every effort to avoid contact with his countrymen.*” This writer saw Southern granaries full and jails empty, while free Europe, which the free North emulated as plagued by famine, devoid of religious faith, and replete with poorhouses filled to the brim. Thus, because of her slavish following of an unworthy example, the North was a land of “*riots, trade-unions, strikes, and socialism.*” 28

Within this view, the people of the North had even passed condemnation upon their own society, as evidenced by the fact that “*the rich and the learned*” were “*Socialists, the poor.....revolutionists, rioters, anti-renters, Infidels,*

27 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 299

28 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 299.

Mormons, Shakers, Greeleyites, Fusionists, Owenites, Free Lovers, etc.,” who had given up on the cause of democracy in favor of experimenting with forming a new society. 29

According to the southern view, the spread of isms in the North revealed a lack of stability. The “*ism-smitten people of Massachusetts*” wrote one Southern editor was comprised “*entire classes of them, factories of them, Counties of them, Cities full of them, crowd to hear a Bloomer-clad unsexed lecturer, who has left her husband at home to take care of the children – she being strong minded.*” According to another southern writer, abolitionism, was but “*the head and front of the family of isms as numerous as the catalogues of folly and wickedness [were] capable of containing.*” The upshot here is that all of these isms were intent upon overthrowing congenial society, uprooting religion and remaking the entire world upon some utopian and impracticable plan. All of this pointed towards anarchy, and all followed a direct and short road to infidelity. 30

In sharp contrast to this chaos was the stable Southern social order founded on slavery. A society totally exempt from all the maladies effecting the Northern and English communities, i.e., the labor riots in which the masses arose in the interest of equity and against tyranny, toiling for a mere pittance only to be crushed by a ruling elite. Such circumstances could never exist where the “*bondsman, as a lower class, as the sub-stratum of society constituted an always reliable, never wavering foundation, whereupon the social fabric rested securely,*

29 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 300.

30 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 300.

rooted and grounded in stability, and entirely beyond the reach of agitation by such causes which shook other communities to their center.” 31

Another argument used to prove the greater stability of the South were the number of landowners. Senator Dawson of Georgia researched the census of 1850 and concluded that the slaveholding states were also the states in which the greatest number of landowners resided. Nearly one-half of the white adults in South Carolina owned land, as compared to only one fifth in Massachusetts. The same demographic group in Virginia was twice the number as his contemporary in New York. Kentucky had one-third more landowners than Ohio, and Mississippi more than Illinois or Indiana. Thus, the Senator concluded that farms and plantations were the “*great nurseries.....of liberty, of valor, of patriotism, of morals.*” 32

The university was seen as another stabilizing influence on southern society. While students in the North might well be subjected to the disturbing ideas of teachers such as Thomas Cooper or Horace Greeley, a superior society such as the South would never permit its basic values and foundations to be corrupted by such sources. Non-Southern thought processes could never be disseminated to the South’s youth. 33

Thus, a form of national schizophrenia griped the southern mindset, driving a wedge between the people of the two regions. People in the North pictured those who lived in the South as “*haughty nabobds,*” intemperate and lax in morals, dwelling in great white pillared houses, wringing wealth from those in

31 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 300.

32 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War pg. 301.

bondage and sorrow, and seeking to destroy the best government on the face of the earth. Sinners and aristocrats *par excellence!* In turn, people in the South looked upon all Northerners as Yankees and John Browns. Incrimination bred incrimination. Gradually, the South was assigned the role of Devil in the old Puritan conflict to establish the Holy Commonwealth. Consequently, Southern life and institutions were twisted to fit the part. 34

Industrialism and the North

In the way that cotton dominated the South, manufacturing transformed the North. At the close of the American Revolution, about three-quarters of the free people in New England and the mid-Atlantic states lived and worked on family farms. By 1860, farm families made up just four percent of the population of these states, and approximately a million people were employed in a new emerging industrial economy. As this new manufacturing sector boomed, the demand for labor expanded. Like slavery in the South, the wage system became the core institution of the northern economy, steadily supplanting other ways of making a living. 35

These wageworkers in the North came from many backgrounds. Some were the descendants of maritime workers, domestic servants, and common laborers. Some were former slaves or the descendants of slaves. Many were from trades such as printing and shoemaking who, or whose employers, had been driven out of business by competition from factories. Wage work had also

33 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 301.

34 Craven, Avery, The Coming Civil War pg. 18.

35 Chitty, A.B., and Murolo, Priscilla, Sacco, Joe, From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, NY, 2001, pg. 59.

absorbed the many new Americans, especially immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and England. But by far, this new class was comprised of native-born men and women from farming areas driven from their lands by land shortages, debt, and competition from midwestern agrarians. 36

As in the case of the slaves, wage work varied in terms of conditions. Domestic servants, the largest occupational group among women usually lived in their employer's homes, received cash payments in addition to their room and board, and had almost no time to themselves. Other wage earners typically worked twelve to fourteen hours per day with Sundays off, with pay differing from group to group. Across the board, wage earners shared some common problems: poverty, insecurity despite long hours of labor, driven by bosses who continually tried to get more for less, inequality under political and legal systems designed primarily for the elites. In every sector of the work force, activists protested these conditions through collective actions. 37

The economic growth immediately following the Mexican War brought with it an over expansion in most every industrial area, ultimately bringing on the panic of 1857 and economic ruin to many industries. All of this resulted in the reorganization and consolidation of many industries, concentrating control in the hands of a relatively few capitalists. Labor everywhere lost ground. Wages were lowered, and when labor troubles followed, foreigners in large numbers found their way into factories. The native-born factory worker was replaced by the Irish

36 Chitty, A.B., Murolo, Priscilla, Sacco, Joe, From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States, pg. 60.

37 Chitty, A.B., Murolo, Priscilla, Sacco, Joe, From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States, pg. 61.

woman, or by an inferior type of native worker. Strikes and lockouts occurred frequently, as the employer paternalism of the previous decades passed away. Capital and labor began to assume their modern attitudes and relationships. 38

As noted, the panic of 1857 abruptly ended the economic boom that followed the Mexican War. The panic was touched off by the failure of the New York branch of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Co., a major financial institution that collapsed as the result of embezzlement. Immediately following the collapse of Ohio Life, British investors began to remove funds from American banks, raising questions of overall soundness. Soon thereafter, grain prices fell, spreading the economic misery into rural areas. In the industrial areas, manufactured goods began to pile up in warehouses, leading to massive layoffs, and widespread railroad failures. As the railroads collapsed, so did land speculation schemes, ruining thousands of investors. 39

Confidence was further shaken in September when 30,000 pounds of gold was lost at sea while being shipped from the San Francisco Mint to eastern banks. Soon, public confidence in the government's ability to back its paper currency with specie began to decline, resulting in the declaration of a banking holiday in New England, in an attempt to avert runs on those institutions. Eventually the panic and depression spread to Europe, South America and the Far East. No recovery was on the horizon in the United States for a year and a half and the full impact of the depression did not dissipate until the Civil War.

38 Craven, Avery, The Coming of the Civil War, pg. 126.

39 Commanger, Henry Steele, Leuchtenburg, William E., and Morison, Samuel Eliot, The Growth of the American Republic: Volume 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1980, pg 581.

Because it was less industrialized, the South was hurt less than the other regions of the country, leading many to incorrectly conclude that the superiority of the economic system of the South had been vindicated.

Summary

In summary, a comparison of the labor systems of the North and South is mostly a study of how nineteenth century Americans viewed the application of democratic principles to the social order. At this stage, democracy was a work in progress. Thomas Jefferson possessed no blueprint of the democracy he envisioned in the Declaration of Independence, and indeed, likely viewed its principles differently than would many modern political philosophers after two and one half centuries of perspective.

According to the German Karl von Clausewitz, a country will adopt the strategy for fighting a war most consistent with its social order. By the same token it can be argued that at a time when new democratic values were being shaped by two very different American cultures sharing the same continent, each would seek an application of same most consistent with its economic necessity. In the North, industrialism had finally found America setting off a spiraling cycle of growth and prosperity resulting in negative externalities, i.e., labor strife etc. These maladies were considered well worth the struggle by most Northern elites who were committed to the nurturing of a free enterprise capitalistic system, notwithstanding its warts.

By the same token, the failure of the South to industrialize resulted in the necessity to embrace a view of labor, as well as a view of the superiority of

agriculture consistent with its agrarian economic system. In short, as tragic as it was, the Civil War was a conflict, which had to happen. It was the single most defining moment of the new American Nation. It had to happen to define what America was and would become. It had to happen to settle for once and for all the fundamental principles i.e., ..is it the United States are.....or is it the United States is....? It had to settle the question of whether America would be one sovereign nation or an amalgamation of sovereign states all struggling within Adam Smith's world of "self interest?" In like manner the war had to settle questions, i.e., what the relationship would be between management and labor in a democracy, as well as the relationships between each individual American and his government. In short, all of this was part of a natural evolutionary process, which produced the country and culture in which we live today.

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