

History of slavery in the southern usa



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The Changing (Inland) South: Slavery and Plantation Agriculture

The Southern part of the United States has a unique history that includes European settlements, institution of slavery and a legacy of Confederacy during the Civil War. The rich past of this region has helped develop a distinct set of customs, beliefs and life styles. Slavery began in the United States in the early 16th Century soon after the English landed in Virginia (Birdsall et al, 2005). They started out by using Native Americans, however, since they were in their homeland and knew the terrain considerably well they would escape easily. Thus, they found it easier and profitable to sell them to plantations in the Caribbean. During this time, the labor needs of the colonies were rapidly increasing and to meet these demands they turned to importing African slaves. They were not introduced to the South in large amounts however they eventually began to play an important role in the social environment and organization.

From around 1619 to 1865, people of African descent were legally imported by a majority of whites in the Southern United States (Berlin, 1993). Slavery spread rapidly in the American colonies where they began passing laws that regulated slave relations. By 1770, approximately 40% of the total population in the South were slaves and the highest number were found in South Carolina (Berlin, 1993). At the end of the 17th Century, there were a number of colonies that were growing. Much of the population were in the North-Eastern and middle colonies where the Southern colonies of Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas were rural frontier land. The economy of the South was mainly based on agriculture at this time and wealthy families

formed plantations since they saw great opportunity (Bailey, 1994). The main reason for importing these slaves was to use them as laborers on the plantations, which are large farms where crops such as cotton, tobacco and rice grow. In addition, they were used for clearing forests, craft workers, nurses and house servants. Initially, most of the crops grown in the upper South states of North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland were tobacco and the lower South states of Georgia and South Carolina grew rice (Bonacich, 1975).

The tobacco leaf was imported from the West Indies where it thrived in the heat of Virginian lowlands and changed the colony's whole economy (Berlin, 1993). Tobacco growing changed from small farms in an area to a colony that was composed of large scale farms and plantations because tobacco wasn't profitable when it was produced in a small scale. Over time the growing of tobacco created a problem since much of the soil's nutrients were depleted quite quickly so the farmers were forced to push westward. In addition, a limited amount of slaves went to the North in wheat producing states such as New York, however the climate and the soil restricted the development of agriculture and thus the slaves were not needed in this region (Bonacich, 1975). Charleston, South Carolina was the main town for trading in the South since it provided a port for the English ships to bring in products. The Southern colonies exported rice, cotton, tobacco and imported slaves and sugar (Berlin, 1993).

Another type of crop that was cultivated in the South was rice which originated from Madagascar and was brought in by the Spanish at the beginning of the 18th Century (Berlin, 1993). Due to the slaves having prior knowledge of rice culture, many cultivators took advantage of this by

importing them to work at the many rice plantations in Georgetown, Savannah and Charleston. The plantation owners learned several new techniques from the slaves that included how to flood the fields and dyke the marshes (Kolchin, 2007). There was an increase in popularity and profitability of rice cultivation when the rice mill, where water was used to power the mill, was invented by Jonathan Lucas. Rice cultivation has continued to be an important type of agriculture in Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas since the mid 19th Century (Wikipedia, 2007). Following the late 17th century, the North and South started to diverge in economies. The South was emphasizing more on exporting their crops whereas the North was more on food production. The upper colonies of Virginia and North Carolina were established in tobacco production and the lower colonies of Georgia and South Carolina were focused on rice production (Bonacich, 1975). In addition, much of the South did not go through the industrialization like the North did and it remained mostly rural. In 1860 there were only five southern cities that had more than 50, 000 people (Kolchin, 2007).

By the beginning of the 19th century there was an expansion of slavery that occurred all along the United States. This was because of the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 (Bailey, 1994). It was an efficient machine that was used to separate the fiber from the cotton seed allowing the cultivators to plant a variety of cotton that was well suited for the soil in the South. Since the demands for cotton increased and the tools made it easier to do produce, many of the farmers were attracted to it in the South. The only catch was that it was still an intensive labor process so the slaves were used and cotton production spread westward to Alabama, Mississippi and

Louisiana (Kolchin, 2007). From 1790 to 1860 around one million slaves were moved to the West either with their masters or they were sold directly to the planters by seaboard states. The amount of cotton that was produced till the Civil War in Southern United States was around 2, 275 million tons (Bailey, 1994).

When slavery was abolished in the North in 1830, it began a revolutionary era which divided the United States into the slavery South and the free North. Although a majority of Southern families did not own slaves since the proportion declined from 1830 to 1860, the people still believed in the essence of slavery (Kolchin, 2007). One of the main reasons this war started was to end the Southern slavery, however, the south wanted to protect slavery as they thought it would lead to economic destruction if it was banned (Bonacich, 1975). President Abraham Lincoln did not put forward federal laws against slavery where it was taking place but instead he wanted to arrest any further spread of it. In the late 1850s the South feared that they would lose control of the government to antislavery and the North feared that the slave power was already controlling the government which led to a crisis. In the end, the American Civil War took place, from 1861 to 1865, in which there was a conflict between the United States of America or the Union and the Confederate States of America (Wikipedia, 2007). As the war went on the, the North was very strong in abolishing slavery and on January 1st, 1863, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution ended the long battle and slavery finally ended. It was ratified by three-fourths of the states and formally declared in effect on December 18th, 1965 (Kolchin, 2007).

Since the South was the wealthiest part of the United States, the region suffered a great deal during the twelve year reconstruction period after the war. The Confederate states lost around two-thirds of their wealth during the war along with the many slaves who were now free (Kolchin, 2007). Also, more than a half of the farming machinery was destroyed and the livestock were killed. During this time, the North and South began to debate the future of the black Americans resulting in many political battles. Thousands of blacks who were landless and poor left the South to newer territories that had been open in the West. In 1879, there was a migration called Exoduster Movement in which around 20, 000 blacks from Louisiana and Mississippi left for Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado, establishing a number of all-black towns (Kolchin, 2007). Many found jobs as plant farmers and mine workers. However, despite the ratification of the Amendments to the Constitution, black Americans failed to win full equal rights and as the 20th century began, a majority of them stayed in the South living a very segregated life. Today, the South is disadvantaged financially since after the Civil War, the entire economy of the region was ruined (Birdsall et al, 2005). There were no laborers to work in the fields of the plantations which resulted in owners abandoning there farms and being sent into poverty. The South also didn't have many industrialized businesses thus many southerners had no where to work and no source of income. Poverty still exists in some areas such as West Virginia, Appalachia and the Black Belt (Wikipedia, 2007).

In all we can see that the South has significantly changed from the 17th century to the 19th century. The issue of importing African slaves who were used as laborers on the plantations was quite beneficial for the economy,

however, over time it showed how disastrous it was to the region due to Civil War. The successful plantations allowed the south to export many agricultural products such as rice, tobacco and cotton. The money that was collected over the many years of exporting products in the South was gone when the Civil War began. The results of the war included a division of the North and South, division in the black and whites and poverty in the whole region.

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