

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## COTTON, SLAVERY, AND THE OLD SOUTH

### Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 11 should enable the student to understand

1. The staple crop economic system and how it shaped commercial life in the Old South.
2. The Old South's "colonial dependency" and why it did little to change it.
3. The role of the planter in the southern social and economic system.
4. The role of the "Southern Lady" in the Old South.
5. Who the "plain folks" were and their significance in the southern social order.
6. The role of an enslaved people in the southern social and economic system.
7. The various ways in which slaves resisted slavery.
8. The ways African Americans developed their own separate culture and how it helped sustain them under slavery.
9. The continuing historical debate over the South, its "peculiar institution," and the effects of enslavement on African Americans.

### Main Themes

1. How economic power shifted from the "upper" to the "lower" South and the impact this had on southern social and political development.
2. How society in the South developed in both myth and reality.
3. The nature of the South's "peculiar institution" and the effect it had on the southern way of life for both whites and blacks.

### Glossary

1. planter: A term used to identify a southerner whose combination of land and slaves was such that they stood out as the prominent staple producers in their area. A social as well as an economic designation, it was used to identify the agricultural elite in the South.
2. manumission: The act of freeing a slave.

### Pertinent Questions

#### THE COTTON ECONOMY (294-303)

1. What was "the most important economic development in the South of the mid-nineteenth century"? What caused this and what was its economic impact?
2. What were the agricultural regions in the South and what crops were grown in them?
3. How did cotton become "king" in the South and what did this mean for the development of the region?
4. What role did the "business classes" of the South play in the region's economic development? What element was most important in this group? Why?

5. What does the author mean by the statement that the antebellum South had a "colonial" economy?
6. What was the "cavalier" image and how were southern planters able to create it?
7. Though only a small minority of southern whites owned slaves, the region was seen—both by the outside world and by many southerners themselves—as a society dominated by great plantations and wealthy landowning planters. How did this happen?
8. How did the idea of "honor" affect southern life in the years prior to the Civil War?
9. How was the role played by affluent southern white women like that of their northern counterparts? How was it different?
10. What accounted for the difference identified in question 9? Why did so few southern white women rebel against their role?
11. If "the typical white southerner was not a great planter," what was he? Describe and explain the way of life of the southern "plain folk."
12. Why did so few nonslaveholding whites oppose the slaveholding oligarchy? Where did these opponents live?

### **SLAVERY: THE "PECULIAR INSTITUTION" (303-310)**

13. What were slave codes? What function did they serve? How were they applied and what resulted from their violation?
14. How was slave life shaped by the slave's relationship with his or her owner?
15. Explain the "actual material condition of slavery" and the debate over it.
16. Were there "classes" among the slaves? What evidence is there to support this?
17. How did slavery in the cities differ from slavery on the plantation? What effect did urban slavery have on the "peculiar institution" and on the relationship between white and black?
18. How extensive was the practice of manumission in the South? What was the status of the freed slave in the South, and how did this compare with the status of freed people in the North?
19. Explain the characteristics of the foreign and domestic slave trade. On what grounds was this trade criticized, and how did the South answer this criticism?
20. How did the slave respond to slavery? What evidence exists to show that slaves did not accept their condition without protest and, in some cases, outright defiance?
21. What were the most widely recognized slave revolts? What did they accomplish?

### **THE CULTURE OF SLAVERY (310-313)**

22. Explain how the process of adaptation helped slaves develop their own separate culture. How was this a form of resistance as well?
23. What role did language and music play in sustaining racial pride and unity for slaves?
24. What role did religion play in the life of slaves? What role did the slave family play?

### **WHERE HISTORIANS DISAGREE (306)**

25. How have historical interpretations of the impact of slavery on the slaves evolved over the years?
26. What factors have shaped these historians' assessments?

### **PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE (311)**

27. How did music both shape and reflect the lives of African Americans on slave plantations?

same things. At the same time, there were significant differences among members of the white community, differences which were not always apparent to the casual observer. African Americans, also united by race and in most cases by slavery, found a variety of ways to maintain their dignity and, in so doing, managed to create an enduring cultural system that transcended their condition and enabled them to endure the hardships they faced.

### **Review Questions**

These questions are to be answered with essays. This will allow you to explore relationships between individuals, events, and attitudes of the period under review.

1. According to the text, "the most important economic development in the mid-nineteenth-century South was the shift of economic power from the 'upper South' . . . to the 'lower South.' Why was this so important?
2. What was "the southern way of life" for white southerners—the planter and his family, the plain folks?
3. What was "the southern way of life" for black southerners—men, women, house servants, field hands, rural and urban, slave and free?
4. If nothing else, slavery set the South apart, made it unique. But how did the institution function? Analyze the plantation system, its social and its economic functions. How did it control its labor? And what was the response of these workers?
5. Explain the "spirited debate" that has gone on among historians over the nature of American slavery. Where does your textbook fit into this debate?

### **Chapter Self Test**

After you have read the chapter in the text and done the exercises in the Study Guide, take the following self test to see if you understand the material you have covered. Answers appear at the end of the Study Guide.

### **MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS**

Circle the letter of the response that best answers the question or completes the statement.

1. The southern failure to create a flourishing commercial or industrial economy was in part the result of:
  - a. a lack of business talent in the South.
  - b. an unwillingness on the part of the southerners to take risks.
  - c. a set of values distinctive to the South that discouraged the growth of cities and industry.
  - d. a slave labor force that could not work successfully in industry.
2. The most important economic development in the mid-nineteenth-century South was the:
  - a. invention of the cotton gin.
  - b. shift of economic power from the "upper South" to the "lower South."
  - c. increased agricultural diversity of the region.
  - d. decline in the price of slaves.
3. The expansion of southern agriculture from 1820 to 1860 was due to the expansion of the cultivation of:
  - a. western rice.

- b. tobacco in Kentucky.
  - c. Louisiana sugar.
  - d. short-staple cotton in the Black Belt.
4. The South in 1860, in contrast to 1800, had become:
- a. a primarily rural and agricultural region.
  - b. increasingly unlike the North and increasingly sensitive to criticism.
  - c. a region where political power rested in the hands of small farmers.
  - d. more urban and more industrialized.
5. A minority of southern whites owned slaves:
- a. and nonslaveholders dominated the political system in the region.
  - b. but the slaveholding planters exercised power and influence far in excess of their numbers.
  - c. so slavery was not very important in the lives of most whites.
  - d. and most whites were happy with it that way.
6. The South had a "colonial" economy in that:
- a. most of its land was owned by outside interests.
  - b. it employed slave labor.
  - c. it produced raw materials and purchased finished products.
  - d. had little political power.
7. According to the "cavalier" image, southern planters were:
- a. mostly horsebreeders.
  - b. really a rough-and-tumble group of people.
  - c. genteel aristocrats.
  - d. successful agricultural businessmen.
8. Most southern white "ladies" were:
- a. less subordinate to men than in the North.
  - b. relatively isolated from people outside their own families.
  - c. better educated than their northern counterparts.
  - d. more likely to engage in public activities or income-producing employment than their northern counterparts.
9. The typical white southerner was:
- a. a planter with many slaves and a lot of land.
  - b. a small-town merchant or professional man.
  - c. extremely poor.
  - d. a modest yeoman farmer.
10. Although most whites did not own slaves, most supported the plantation system because:
- a. it controlled the slaves.
  - b. they had economic ties to it.
  - c. slaveholder and nonslaveholder were often related.
  - d. of all of the above.
11. Which of the following was not a condition of slave life in the South?
- a. An adequate if rough diet.

- b. Hard work, even for women and children.
  - c. The freedom to use the time after work as they wished to.
  - d. Isolation and control.
12. The slave codes of the southern states:
- a. imposed a uniformly harsh and dismal regime for southern slaves.
  - b. allowed slaves a great deal of flexibility and autonomy.
  - c. created a paternal and benevolent relationship between master and slave.
  - d. contained rigid provisions but were unevenly enforced.
13. Slaves seemed to prefer to live on larger plantations because:
- a. masters supervised workers personally and often worked alongside them.
  - b. they had more opportunities for privacy and for a social world of their own.
  - c. masters seemed more concerned with their health and welfare.
  - d. the work was lighter and provisions were more abundant.
14. By 1860, which of the following states had the highest proportion of slaveholding to nonslaveholding white families?
- a. Virginia.
  - b. Georgia.
  - c. South Carolina.
  - d. Arkansas.
15. If there was dangerous work to be done:
- a. masters generally hired slaves rather than use their own.
  - b. free labor, often Irishmen, might be hired.
  - c. it made no difference to masters, who used their slaves no matter what the conditions.
  - d. only older slaves were used.
16. As southern cities grew, the number of slaves in them declined because:
- a. urban slaveholders, fearing rebellion, sold their slaves.
  - b. diseases in cities killed them off.
  - c. men outnumbered women, so there was no natural increase.
  - d. slaves in the city ran away to the countryside.
17. The historical debate over the nature of plantation slavery demonstrates:
- a. the difficulty in researching a field in which few documents exist.
  - b. the extent to which historians are influenced by the times in which they write.
  - c. basic agreement that slavery was a brutal, savage institution that dehumanized all participants.
  - d. that black slaves in the South were generally content and happy with their lot.
18. In The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom (1976), Herbert Gutman argued that:
- a. slave families were better treated and lived in greater comfort than did northern industrial workers.
  - b. the black family survived slavery with impressive strength.
  - c. slavery destroyed the significance of the father in the black family.
  - d. slaves were unable to establish strong family ties.

19. The only slave insurrection in the nineteenth century South was led by:
  - a. Gabriel Prosser.
  - b. Denmark Vesey.
  - c. Nat Turner.
  - d. Frederick Douglass.
20. Black adaptation to slavery:
  - a. revealed a passive contentment with bondage.
  - b. produced a rich and complex culture in support of racial pride and unity.
  - c. undermined black conversion to Christianity.
  - d. resulted in the loss of all cultural elements of African life.

### **TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS**

Read each statement carefully. Mark true statements "T" and false statements "F."

1. The South, like the North, changed from an agricultural to an industrial economy during the period from 1820 to 1850.
2. The South had very few professional people.
3. According to De Bow's Review, the South had a "colonial" relationship with the North.
4. Planters in the South were just as much competitive capitalists as the industrialists in the North.
5. Most southern planters actually were "cavaliers."
6. Most nonslaveowning whites lived far from the planters and their plantations.
7. The South in mid-nineteenth century was the only area in the western world except for Brazil and Cuba where slavery still existed.
8. Under the code of "chivalry," women were to be protected, and in return they were expected to obey men.
9. When the foreign slave trade ended, the domestic slave trade declined as well.
10. The majority of the South's white population consisted of modest farmers largely excluded from the dominant plantation society.
11. Small farmers in the South were more committed to a traditional patriarchal family structure than were the planters.
12. As a group, slaves were as healthy as whites and the black population increased more rapidly than the white.
13. More than half of the free blacks lived in Virginia and Maryland.
14. By the 1850s the domestic slave trade was no longer important to the growth and prosperity of the South.
15. Few slave families were actually broken apart by the slave trade.
16. African American religion reflected the influence of African customs and practices.
17. The dominant response of African Americans to slavery was a combination of adaptation and resistance.
18. Because of the pressures of bondage, slave marriages seldom lasted.
19. Masters used paternalism as a means of control.
20. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, black and white women on plantations shared a common female identity born of their shared subordination to men.