

**THE SOUTH AND  
SLAVERY,  
CHAPTER 10  
NOTES, PART 3**

# African American Community

- Slaves had to carve out a community with other slaves
- Slaves were property, but most owners recognized that their slaves were human
- Owners learned to live with the two key institutions of African American community life:
  - Family
  - Church

# Slave Population Growth

- African American slave women gave birth to an average of six to eight children at year-and-a-half intervals
- Slave owners wanted them to work hard during pregnancy and with young children
- Mortality rates for slave children under five were twice those for white counterparts

# Life Expectancy for 1850

- ◎ 40-43 years for whites
- ◎ 30-33 years for African Americans
  - Why?
    - Poor housing
    - Poor diet
    - Heavy work

# Growing Up

- Born a slave, and destined to remain a slave
- Children observed how the system worked—penalties, being sold off, etc.
- Ways of surviving:
  - Pilfering
  - Malingering
  - Sabotage

# Intelligence Game

- Many slaves pretended to be more grateful and less intelligent than they really were
- Many slave owners believed it
- “As the master studies to keep the slave ignorant, the slave is cunning enough to make the master think he succeeds.”

--Frederick Douglass

Education:

No formal schooling (against the law in most states to teach a slave to read)

# Slave Families

- No southern state officially recognized slave marriages
- Owners often encouraged them, however
- Slave marriages were actually closer to a relationship of equals than white marriages in the South
- Separation of families was common

# Separation

- 1 out of 5 marriages was broken by separation
- 1 out of 3 children were sold away from their families
- In response, the larger slave community was treated as a large family
  - Adults called “aunt” and “uncle”
  - Children called “brother” and “sister”

# African American Religion

- Many African religious traditions came with the slaves and remained part of the culture
- 1760s—Great Awakening introduced many slaves to Christianity
- 1790s—Second Great Awakening
- Christianity gave them a message of faith, love, deliverance, the coming promised land

# Perspectives on Slave Religion

- ⦿ Why did masters allow Christianity?
  - Some did not want to deny religion from the slaves
  - Many believed it would make their slaves more obedient and well-behaved
- ⦿ Christianity was combined with elements of African culture
  - Circle dance
  - Call-and-response
  - Group singing
- ⦿ Spiritual expression was something that could not be taken from them

# Escape

- ◎ Why not just run away?
- ◎ Distance
  - Almost all escapes were in the Upper South
- ◎ Control
  - Slave patrols were common—searching for runaway slaves
  - A slave without a pass was captured and returned

# Slave Revolt

- ◎ Nat Turner
  - Literate slave and lay preacher
  - Led a slave revolt in August of 1831
  - Killed his master, Joseph Travis, first
  - Moved from plantation to plantation, killing a total of fifty-five white people
- ◎ 40 slaves were executed after the revolt
- ◎ Turner was well-treated by his Master before the revolt
- ◎ Only force kept African Americans enslaved—white Southerners were never free from fear of a possible revolt

# Free African Americans

- By 1860, nearly 250,000 free African-Americans lived in the South
- Freedom was not uncommon prior to 1800, but by 1830, manumission (freeing slaves) was almost impossible in the South
- Black codes were made more restrictive in the 1830s
  - Except for the right to own property, free blacks had no civil rights in the South

# The White Majority

- ◎ 2/3 of Southerners did not own slaves
- ◎ Middle Class
  - Merchants, bankers, lawyers, entrepreneurs
  - Entrepreneurs were not valued in the South
    - Example: William Gregg established a cotton textile mill in South Carolina
  - Exception: Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond was the third-largest foundry in the nation
  - Why not valued?: Planters thought businessmen lacked independence because they had to please suppliers and customers

# Poor Whites

- 30 to 50 percent of southern whites were landless
- Many unskilled jobs were filled with slave labor, so there were few options for poor whites
- Most poor whites insisted on their racial superiority, but many worked alongside slaves
- Existence of poor whites was problematic for the slave system—if whites are racially superior, then why were slaves sometimes in a better position with respect to food and clothing than poor whites

# Yeoman Values

- Yeoman—farmer who works his own land
- Goal for Yeoman farmer families: economic independence
- Valued the local community
- Wanted to maintain their independence and saw northern industry and capitalism as a threat to that

# Small Slave Owners

- Only 36 percent of southern whites owned slaves in the 1830s
- Only 2.5 percent owned fifty slaves or more
- Largest group of slaveowners were small yeoman farmers, but it was difficult for them to come up with the money for many slaves
- Doctors, lawyers, and merchants were able to buy many slaves because they had money to invest

# Planter Elite

- ◎ Slave-owning elite
- ◎ Most large planters inherited most of their wealth
- ◎ Most lived in isolation on their plantations
- ◎ Modeled their lifestyle on the English aristocracy:
  - Large estate
  - Spacious mansion
  - Lavish hospitality
  - Men:
    - Hunting, soldiering, politics
  - Women:
    - Gentle, charming, hospitable

# Image v. Reality

- Gracious image
- But, has to keep slaves working
- Plus, much to oversee with a plantation—large business enterprise to manage

# Plantation Mistress

- Heavy responsibility without real authority
- Supervised the house slaves
- Hospitality was not easy
- Alone on the plantation, away from family

# Coercion and Violence

- Most large slave owners believed that discipline and coercion were necessary
- Sexual abuse of female slaves by masters was common
- “God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system....Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines, and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds.”
  - Mary Boykin Chestnut, wife of a South Carolina slave owner

# Defense of Slavery

- Issue: What do to with a third of the population of the South that was made up of slaves?
- “We have the wolf by the ears; and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go.”—Thomas Jefferson

# Proslavery Arguments

- Greece and Rome
- Bible
- Constitution tacitly approved of slavery