

THE SOUTH

- Defined in economic, political, and social terms, the South as a distinct region included those states that permitted slavery, including certain Border States (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri) that did not join the Confederacy in the Civil War

Agriculture & King Cotton

- Agriculture was the foundation of the South's economy, even though by the 1850s small factories in the region were producing about 15% of the nation's manufactured goods
- Tobacco, rice, and sugarcane were important cash crops, but these were far exceeded by the South's chief economic activity which was the production and sale of cotton
- The development of mechanized textile mills in England, coupled with Eli Whitney's cotton gin, made cotton cloth affordable, not just in Europe and the United States, but throughout the world
- Before 1860, the world depended chiefly on Britain's mills for its supply of cloth, & Britain in turn depended chiefly on the American South for its supply of cotton fiber
- Originally, the cotton was grown almost entirely in two states, South Carolina and Georgia, but as demand and profits increased, planters moved westward into Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas
- New land was constantly needed, for the high cotton yields required for profits quickly depleted the soil
- By the 1850s, cotton provided two-thirds of all U.S. exports & tied the South's economy to its best customer which was Britain
- "Cotton is king," said one southerner of his region's greatest asset

Slavery, the "Peculiar Institution"

- Wealth in the South was measured in terms of land and slaves
- Slaves were treated as a form of property, subject to being bought and sold
- Most Southern whites were sensitive to the fact that slaves were human beings
- Their uneasiness with this fact & the need continually to defend slavery caused them to refer to it as "that peculiar institution"
- In colonial times, it had been justified as an economic necessity, but in the 19th century, apologists for slavery used historical & religious arguments to support their claim that it was good for both slave and master

Population

- The cotton boom was responsible for a huge increase in the number of slaves from 1 million in 1800 to nearly 4 million in 1860
- Most of the increase came from natural reproduction, although thousands of Africans were also smuggled into the South in defiance of Congress' prohibition in 1808 against importing slaves
- In many parts of the Deep South, slaves made up as much as 75% of the total population
- Fearing slave revolts, southern legislatures added increased restrictions on movement and education to their slave codes

Economics

- Slaves were employed doing whatever their owners demanded of them
- The great majority labored in the fields, but many also became expert in a variety of skilled crafts, while others worked as house servants, in factories, and on construction gangs
- Because of the greater profits to be made on the new cotton plantations in the West, many slaves were sold from the Upper South to the cotton-rich Deep South of the lower Mississippi Valley
- By 1860, the value of a field slave had risen to almost \$2,000. One result of the heavy capital investment in slaves was that the South had much less capital than the North to undertake industrialization

Slave Life

- Conditions of slavery varied from one plantation to the next
- Some slaves were humanely treated, while others were routinely beaten
- All suffered alike from being deprived of their freedom
- Families could be separated at any time by an owner's decision to sell a wife, a husband, or a child
- Women were vulnerable to sexual exploitation
- Despite the hard circumstance of their lives, African Americans managed to maintain a strong sense of family & religious faith

Resistance

- Slaves contested their status through a range of actions, including work slowdowns, sabotage, escape, and revolt
- There were a few major uprisings: One was led by Denmark Vesey in 1822 and another by Nat Turner in 1831
- The revolts were quickly and violently suppressed, but even so, they had a lasting impact
- They gave hope to enslaved African Americans, drove southern states to tighten already strict slave codes, & demonstrated to many, especially in the North of slavery

Free African Americans

- By 1860, as many as 250,000 African Americans in the South were not slaves
- They were free citizens (even though, as in the North, racial prejudice restricted their liberties)
- Many slaves had been emancipated during the American Revolution
- Some were mulatto children whose white fathers had decided to liberate them
- Others achieved freedom on their own, when permitted, through self-purchase-if they were fortunate enough to have been paid wages for extra work, usually as skilled craftspeople
- Most of the free southern blacks lived in cities where they could own property
- By state law, they were not equal with whites, were not permitted to vote, and were barred from entering certain occupations
- Constantly in danger of being kidnapped by slave traders, they had to show legal papers proving their free status
- They remained in the South for various reasons
- Some wanted to be near family who were still in bondage; others believed the South to be home & the North to offer no greater opportunities

White Society

- Southern whites observed a rigid hierarchy among themselves, with aristocratic planters at the top and poor whites and mountain people at the bottom of the social pyramid

Aristocracy

- To be a member of the South's small elite of wealthy planters, a person usually had to own at least 100 slaves and farm at least 1,000 acres
- The planter aristocracy maintained its power politically by dominating the state legislatures of the South and enacting laws that favored the large landholders' economic interests

Farmers

- The vast majority of slaveholders had fewer than 20 slaves working several hundred acres
- Southern white farmers produced the bulk of the cotton crop, worked in fields with their slaves, and lived as modestly as farmers of the North

Poor Whites

- 75% of the South's white population owned no slaves
- They couldn't afford the rich river-bottom farmland controlled by the planters, & many lived in the hills as subsistence farmers
- These "hillbillies" or "poor white trash," as they were derisively called by the planters, defended the slave system, thinking that someday they could own slaves & that at least they were superior on the social scale to someone like slaves

Mountain People

- A number of small farmers lived in frontier conditions in isolation from the rest of the South, on slopes & valleys of Appalachian & Ozark Mts.
- The mountain people disliked the planters & their slaves
- During the Civil War, many (including a future president, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee) would remain loyal to the Union

Cities

- Because the South was primarily an agricultural region, there was only a limited need for major cities
- Only New Orleans among the southern cities could be counted among the nation's 15 largest in 1860
(The top five cities in population in 1860 were: New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, New Orleans)
- Cities such as Atlanta, Charleston, Chattanooga, and Richmond were important southern trading centers, but had relatively small populations in comparison to those of the North

Southern Thought

- The South developed a culture and outlook on life that was uniquely its own
- As cotton became the basis of its economy, slavery became the focus of its political thought
- White southerners felt increasingly isolated and defensive about slavery, as northerners grew hostile toward it, and as England, France, and other European nations outlawed it altogether

Code of Chivalry

- Dominated by the aristocratic planter class, the agricultural South was largely a feudal society
- The southern gentleman ascribed to a code of chivalrous conduct, which included a strong sense of personal honor, the defense of womanhood, and paternalistic treatment of all who were deemed inferior, especially slaves

Education

- The upper class valued a college education for their children, more so than in the North
- Acceptable professions for a southern gentleman were limited to farming, law, the ministry, and the military
- For the lower classes, schooling beyond the early elementary grades was generally not available
- To reduce the risk of slave revolts, slaves were strictly prohibited by law from receiving any instruction in reading and writing

Religion

- The slavery question affected church membership
- Partly because they preached biblical support for slavery, both Methodist and Baptist churches gained in membership in the South while splitting in the 1840s with their northern brethren
- The Unitarians, who challenged slavery, faced declining membership & hostility
- Catholics & Episcopalians took a neutral stand on slavery, and their numbers declined in the South