Cotton, Slavery, and the Old South
The Cotton Economy

- Farmers in the South continued to grow tobacco, rice, and sugar until cotton became the major cash crop
- Shift of economic power form the upper South (original states along the Atlantic coast) to the lower South (expanding regions in the Southwest)
- By 1860: South was producing \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the world’s cotton
- Cotton Gin: Device patented by Eli Whitney in 1794 which separated the seeds from the cotton more quickly and efficiently while reducing the amount of labor to produce vast amounts
The Rise of King Cotton

- Promise of cotton profit led to the rise of direct importation of slaves from Africa before the Transatlantic Trade Was made illegal in 1808
- South Carolina politician James Hammond said that the North isn’t a threat because “cotton is king”
The Old Plantation
Decline of the Tobacco Economy

- Growing tobacco rapidly exhausted the land on which it grew. It was hard for farmers to remain in business in the same place for very long.
- By the 1830’s, many farmers in the old tobacco cultivation was moving westward into the Piedmont area.
- The Southern regions of the coastal South (South Carolina, Georgia, and parts of Florida) continued to rely on the cultivation of rice, a more stable and lucrative crop than tobacco.

Short-Staple Cotton

- **Petit Gulf** cotton grew well in different soils & climates
- Produced in the Mississippi River Valley (Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, & Missouri) and other states (texas)
- “Invention of the Saw Gin”
- “The cotton is attached to these on the end of each fibre, just as a human hair is attached to the head” - Christopher Brooks
- Slaves would fill sacks with as much cotton as they could. The “Saw Gin” was used to remove the fiber off the seed then it’s bailed.
Carte-de-visite of women and children in a cotton field
Spread of Cotton Production

- Demand for cotton was growing rapidly at the same time as the growth of the textile industry in (1820-1830) Britain & (1840-1850) New England. This led to the new demand for crops.

- By 1820, the South produced about 500 bales of cotton.

- 1850, 3 million bales per year
  1860, nearly 5 million bales per year which were mostly gained from over-production.

https://www.eliwhitney.org/7/museum/eli-whitney/cotton-gin
Expansion of Slavery

- More than ½ of the Americans who moved to the Southwest were slaves
- 95% of African American population were slaves in 1820
- By 1850, 1.8 million out of 3.2 million slaves were producing cotton
- Cotton & slavery intertwined in the 19th century economy: dependence on the slaves to harvest cotton
U.S. Coast survey map that shows the population of the enslaved people (1860)
Southern Trade & Industry

Booming agricultural expansion was happening in the South and it made it possible for other forms of economic activity to develop slowly. Industries in the South remained an insignificant force compared to the agricultural economy.
The New Orleans Cotton Exchange
Weak Manufacturing Sector

Business class = manufacturers & merchants

Upper South - growing activity in flour milling, textile & iron manufacturing = insignificant compared to the agricultural economy

Merchants (brokers or “planters”) marketed the planters crops where they find the buyers then the proceeds went to purchased goods for the planters they served

Merchant bankers; provided planters w/ credit
Inadequate Regional Transportation system

No investment in roads, canals, and railroads in the South unlike the North

- Canals - almost none
- Roads - crude & unsuitable for heavy transport
- Railroads - didn’t tie the region together effectively

Most remained unconnected to the national railroad system & transported goods using water
- shipped crops to markets using rivers or by sea; most manufactorings in/near port towns
James B. De Bow: most prominent advocate of southern economic independence

Published magazine about southern commercial & agricultural expansion (Review founded in 1846 - 1880)

- Economic independence from the North
- Dangers of colonial relationship
- Evidence of Southern dependency from the North

Printed in NY because no New Orleans printer had facilities adequate for the job

Ex. Charleston sold an avg. 173 copies vs NY who sold 1500 copies to South Carolinas
Sources of Southern Difference

South made efforts to build an economy that might challenge its dependency.

The region was having a growing concern about its colonial dependency.

South Differences from the North was mainly the great profit from their agricultural system, mostly cotton production.
Reasons for Colonial Dependency

There were great profitability in the Southern agricultural system, especially cotton production

Rich southerners invested a lot in their land & slaves,

Southern climate (long, hot, & humid summers) were less suitable for industrial development = unlike Northern climate

Northerners viewed Southerners as people who lacked work ethic that created the northern industrialization / economic development
The Cavalier Image

White Southerners thought of themselves in a special based on values like chivalry, leisure, & elegance

They were “cavaliers” = people happily from the instincts “yankees” of the North

They believed they were more concerned w/ a refined and gracious life compared to rapid growth and development

Conformed to the reality of southern society in very limited ways
White Society

Only a small minority of southern whites owned slaves

- Slave owning families were no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the white population
- Small portion of those slaves owners owned slaves in substantial numbers

1850;
6 m whites
347,000 slave owners

1860;
8 m whites
383,000 slave holders
The Planter Class

- Slave masters authority was enhanced in society because of slaves
- Planters: Owners of large-scale agricultural land with slaves to produce goods to be transported
- Enormous power within society
- “Closest group of people in the New World to the aristocracy of early modern Europe” - Routledge History of Slavery
- Plantation: “an overseas settlement producing a cash crop for export through the labour of enslaved people of African heritage” - Routledge History of Slavery

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantations_in_the_American_South
Planter Aristocracy

- Cotton magnates, sugar, rice, and tobacco nabobs, whites who owned at least 40 or 50 slaves with at least 800 acres of land had a lot of power & influence.
  - Determined the economic & social life of their region
  - Vast annual incomes, big homes, broad acres & many slaves
  - The wealthiest had homes in cities and spent months there
  - Others traveled to serve as an antidote to the isolation
  - Used plantations to host opulent social events
- Wealthy southerners were similar to the old upper classes of England & Europe: true aristocracies

Alex
Plantation Management

- Many rich planters lived modest lives and put most of their money in land and slaves in which they had to supervise very carefully.
  - Moved to new land which were more productive
  - “Genteel aristocrats” aka the cavalier myth - illusion of male benevolence & authority
A cotton plantation in the Mississippi
Aristocratic Values

- Southern white men avoided “course” occupations (trade & commerce)
- Those who weren’t planters chose a more “suitable” career, such as the military.
- Medieval knights were a popular image
- Aristocratic ideals included the roles of southern women (will be explained further on the next slides)

“Honor”

- White men adopted an elaborate code of **chivalry**; they must protect their honor
  - Often through **dueling**
  - Had conventional forms of courtesy & respect in the way they treat each other which is the opposite of the cruelty and disrespect regarding the slave system
- Appearance of dignity & honor (public appearance) were super important
The Modern Tribunal and Arbiter of Men’s Differences

*The Mascot*
Cult of Honor

- Congressman Preston Brooks beat Senator Charles Sumner with a cane for insulting a relative; this wholly accord to the idea of southern honor.
- Books became popular in the South and public example of what southern white males followed.
- Avenging insults became a social necessity. Insults to southern white women meant that the men had to avenge them which was an obligation to be a “gentleman.”

https://www.thoughtco.com/violence-over-slavery-in-senate-1773554
The “Southern Lady”

Southern affluent white women similar to the middle-class women of the North. Their lives centered around their homes and families.
“Her mission is
To labour and to pray; to help, to heal,
To soothe, to bear; patient, with smiles, to
suffer;”

“Woman lives
Man’s constant prophet. If her life be true
And based upon the instincts of her being,
She is a living sermon of that truth
Which ever through her gentle actions speaks,
That life is given to labour and to love.”

Louisa Cheves McCord “Women’s Progress”
Subordinate Status of Women

- Most women lived on farms of modest size, in isolation, no access to the “public world” which gave them limited opportunities beyond being a mother and a wife. This meant that women participate more in the economic life of the family (spinning, weaving, and other production; helped supervise the slave force)
  - Larger plantations = “plantation mistress” in which women were just for display rather than having a role in the economy or society
- Less access to education in comparison to the North
Other Burdens

Birth rates remained 20% and Infant mortality was higher in the region than anywhere else in the nation. Nearly ½ of the children in the South in 1860 died before reaching the age of 5.

The Slave Labor system threatened their relationships with their husbands. Male slave owners often had sexual relationships w/ female slaves & their children served as a reminder to the wife. Few southern white women spoke against the stereotypes of their roles in the region.

Most women found few outlets for the discontent they felt in their life. They convinced themselves of the benefits of their position & defended the virtues of the southern way of life.
The Plain Folk

A typical white southerner was not a great planter nor slave holder, but a modest yeoman farmer

Plain folk = owned few slaves and worked closer than large planters

¾ of white families owned no slaves, because some plain folk devoted themselves largely to subsistence farming
Limited Educational Opportunities

Southern educational system provided poor whites with few opportunities to learn and limited their chances of advancement.

Elementary and secondary schools were not only few, but also inferior to those of Northeast.

A high portion of the southern whites were illiterate.
Hill People

Non slaving whites opposed the elite planters

Southern highlanders = hill people who practiced simple agriculture with no slaves

Hill country farmers lived in a society where they defined individual freedom and unusual isolation from modern notions of the world

Lived in the appalachian ranges east of Mississippi

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Southern_Highlanders
Close Relations w/ Plantation Aristocracy

Small farmers depended on the local plantation aristocracy for greater access to cotton gins, markets, & credit or financial assistance.

Political participation gave workers in the North a sense of connection to the social order.
Commitment to Paternalism

Small farmers were committed to a traditional male dominated family structure.

Other white southerners who did not share in the plantation economy were members of a particularly degraded class.

1850: They were known as “crackers”, “sand hillers”, or “poor white trash”.

Many owned no land, while others worked as laborers for their neighbor.
Limited Class Conflict

Southerners = the true outcasts of white society of the region

No real opposition of slavery or plantation system = because people were so benumbed by poverty that they had little strength to protest