CHAPTER 12

Cotton is King: The Antebellum South, 1800–1860

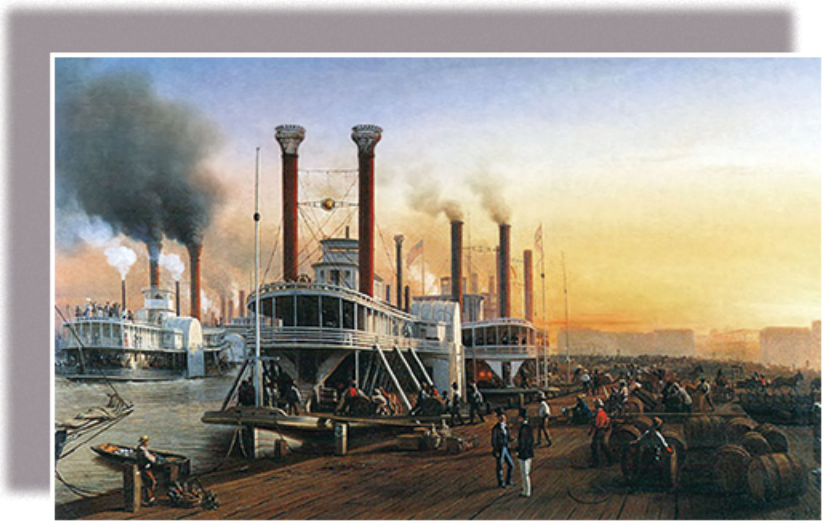

Figure 12.1 *Bateaux à Vapeur Géant, la Nouvelle-Orléans 1853* (*Giant Steamboats at New Orleans, 1853*), by Hippolyte Sebron, shows how New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi River, was the primary trading hub for the cotton that fueled the growth of the southern economy.

Chapter Outline

12.1 The Economics of Cotton
12.2 African Americans in the Antebellum United States
12.3 Wealth and Culture in the South
12.4 The Filibuster and the Quest for New Slave States

Introduction

Nine new slave states entered the Union between 1789 and 1860, rapidly expanding and transforming the South into a region of economic growth built on slave labor. In the image above (**Figure 12.1**), innumerable slaves load cargo onto a steamship in the Port of New Orleans, the commercial center of the antebellum South, while two well-dressed white men stand by talking. Commercial activity extends as far as the eye can see.

By the mid-nineteenth century, southern commercial centers like New Orleans had become home to the greatest concentration of wealth in the United States. While most white southerners did not own slaves, they aspired to join the ranks of elite slaveholders, who played a key role in the politics of both the South and the nation. Meanwhile, slavery shaped the culture and society of the South, which rested on a racial ideology of white supremacy and a vision of the United States as a white man's republic. Slaves endured the traumas of slavery by creating their own culture and using the Christian message of redemption to find hope for a world of freedom without violence.

12.1 The Economics of Cotton

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the labor-intensive processes of cotton production
- Describe the importance of cotton to the Atlantic and American antebellum economy

In the **antebellum** era—that is, in the years before the Civil War—American planters in the South continued to grow Chesapeake tobacco and Carolina rice as they had in the colonial era. Cotton, however, emerged as the antebellum South's major commercial crop, eclipsing tobacco, rice, and sugar in economic importance. By 1860, the region was producing two-thirds of the world's cotton. In 1793, Eli Whitney revolutionized the production of cotton when he invented the **cotton gin**, a device that separated the seeds from raw cotton. Suddenly, a process that was extraordinarily labor-intensive when done by hand could be completed quickly and easily. American plantation owners, who were searching for a successful staple crop to compete on the world market, found it in cotton.

As a commodity, cotton had the advantage of being easily stored and transported. A demand for it already existed in the industrial textile mills in Great Britain, and in time, a steady stream of slave-grown American cotton would also supply northern textile mills. Southern cotton, picked and processed by American slaves, helped fuel the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution in both the United States and Great Britain.

KING COTTON

Almost no cotton was grown in the United States in 1787, the year the federal constitution was written. However, following the War of 1812, a huge increase in production resulted in the so-called **cotton boom**, and by midcentury, cotton became the key **cash crop** (a crop grown to sell rather than for the farmer's sole use) of the southern economy and the most important American commodity. By 1850, of the 3.2 million slaves in the country's fifteen slave states, 1.8 million were producing cotton; by 1860, slave labor was producing over two billion pounds of cotton per year. Indeed, American cotton soon made up two-thirds of the global supply, and production continued to soar. By the time of the Civil War, South Carolina politician James Hammond confidently proclaimed that the North could never threaten the South because

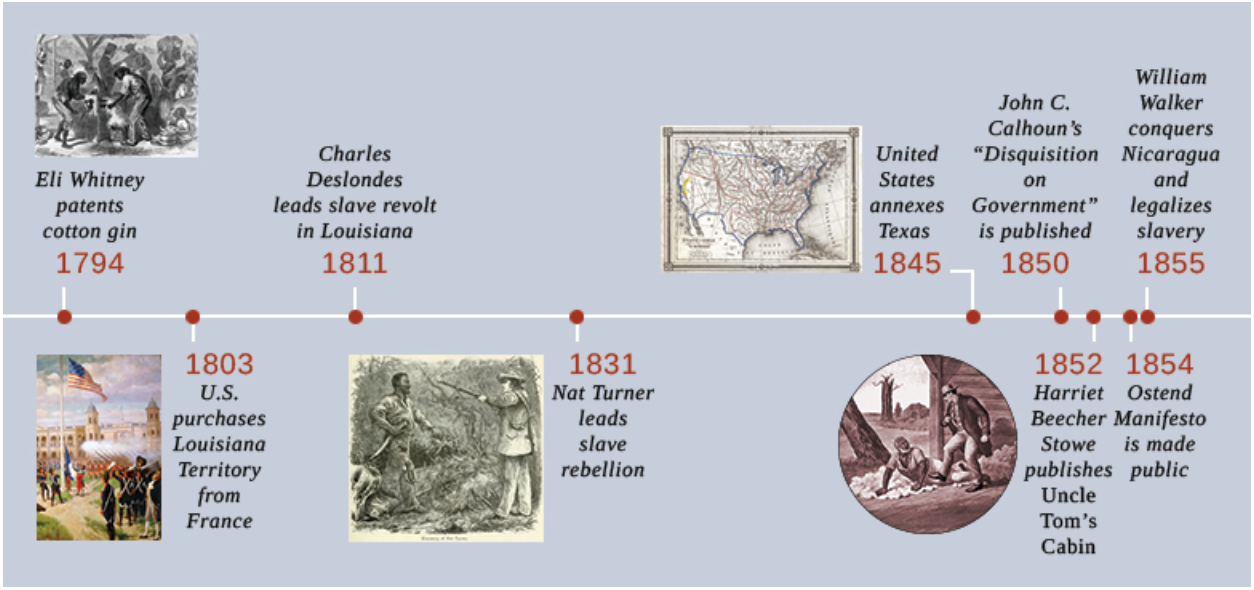

Figure 12.2

"cotton is king."

The crop grown in the South was a hybrid: *Gossypium barbadense*, known as Petit Gulf cotton, a mix of Mexican, Georgia, and Siamese strains. Petit Gulf cotton grew extremely well in different soils and climates. It dominated cotton production in the Mississippi River Valley—home of the new slave states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri—as well as in other states like Texas. Whenever new slave states entered the Union, white slaveholders sent armies of slaves to clear the land in order to grow and pick the lucrative crop. The phrase "to be sold down the river," used by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, refers to this forced migration from the upper southern states to the Deep South, lower on the Mississippi, to grow cotton.

The slaves who built this cotton kingdom with their labor started by clearing the land. Although the Jeffersonian vision of the settlement of new U.S. territories entailed white yeoman farmers single-handedly carving out small independent farms, the reality proved quite different. Entire old-growth forests and cypress swamps fell to the axe as slaves labored to strip the vegetation to make way for cotton. With the land cleared, slaves readied the earth by plowing and planting. To ambitious white planters, the extent of new land available for cotton production seemed almost limitless, and many planters simply leapfrogged from one area to the next, abandoning their fields every ten to fifteen years after the soil became exhausted. Theirs was a world of mobility and restlessness, a constant search for the next area to grow the valuable crop. Slaves composed the vanguard of this American expansion to the West.

Cotton planting took place in March and April, when slaves planted seeds in rows around three to five feet apart. Over the next several months, from April to August, they carefully tended the plants. Weeding the cotton rows took significant energy and time. In August, after the cotton plants had flowered and the flowers had begun to give way to cotton bolls (the seed-bearing capsule that contains the cotton fiber), all the plantation's slaves—men, women, and children—worked together to pick the crop (**Figure 12.3**). On each day of cotton picking, slaves went to the fields with sacks, which they would fill as many times as they could. The effort was laborious, and a white "driver" employed the lash to make slaves work as quickly as possible.

Figure 12.3 In the late nineteenth century, J. N. Wilson captured this image of harvest time at a southern plantation. While the workers in this photograph are not slave laborers, the process of cotton harvesting shown here had changed little from antebellum times.

Cotton planters projected the amount of cotton they could harvest based on the number of slaves under their control. In general, planters expected a good "hand," or slave, to work ten acres of land and pick two hundred pounds of cotton a day. An overseer or master measured each individual slave's daily yield. Great pressure existed to meet the expected daily amount, and some masters whipped slaves who picked less than expected.

Cotton picking occurred as many as seven times a season as the plant grew and continued to produce bolls through the fall and early winter. During the picking season, slaves worked from sunrise to sunset with a ten-minute break at lunch; many slaveholders tended to give them little to eat, since spending on food would cut into their profits. Other slaveholders knew that feeding slaves could increase productivity and therefore provided what they thought would help ensure a profitable crop. The slaves' day didn't end after they picked the cotton; once they had brought it to the gin house to be weighed, they then had to care for the animals and perform other chores. Indeed, slaves often maintained their own gardens and livestock, which they tended after working the cotton fields, in order to supplement their supply of food.

Sometimes the cotton was dried before it was ginned (put through the process of separating the seeds from the cotton fiber). The cotton gin allowed a slave to remove the seeds from fifty pounds of cotton a day, compared to one pound if done by hand. After the seeds had been removed, the cotton was pressed into bales. These bales, weighing about four hundred to five hundred pounds, were wrapped in burlap cloth and sent down the Mississippi River.

Click and Explore

Visit the **Internet Archive (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15LoadCotton)** to watch a 1937 WPA film showing cotton bales being loaded onto a steamboat.

As the cotton industry boomed in the South, the Mississippi River quickly became the essential water highway in the United States. Steamboats, a crucial part of the transportation revolution thanks to their enormous freight-carrying capacity and ability to navigate shallow waterways, became a defining component of the cotton kingdom. Steamboats also illustrated the class and social distinctions of the antebellum age. While the decks carried precious cargo, ornate rooms graced the interior. In these spaces, whites socialized in the ship's saloons and dining halls while black slaves served them (**Figure 12.4**).

Figure 12.4 As in this depiction of the saloon of the Mississippi River steamboat *Princess*, elegant and luxurious rooms often occupied the interiors of antebellum steamships, whose decks were filled with cargo.

Investors poured huge sums into steamships. In 1817, only seventeen plied the waters of western rivers, but by 1837, there were over seven hundred steamships in operation. Major new ports developed at St.

Louis, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; and other locations. By 1860, some thirty-five hundred vessels were steaming in and out of New Orleans, carrying an annual cargo made up primarily of cotton that amounted to $220 million worth of goods (approximately $6.5 billion in 2014 dollars).

New Orleans had been part of the French empire before the United States purchased it, along with the rest of the Louisiana Territory, in 1803. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it rose in prominence and importance largely because of the cotton boom, steam-powered river traffic, and its strategic position near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Steamboats moved down the river transporting cotton grown on plantations along the river and throughout the South to the port at New Orleans. From there, the bulk of American cotton went to Liverpool, England, where it was sold to British manufacturers who ran the cotton mills in Manchester and elsewhere. This lucrative international trade brought new wealth and new residents to the city. By 1840, New Orleans alone had 12 percent of the nation's total banking capital, and visitors often commented on the great cultural diversity of the city. In 1835, Joseph Holt Ingraham wrote: "Truly does New-Orleans represent every other city and nation upon earth. I know of none where is congregated so great a variety of the human species." Slaves, cotton, and the steamship transformed the city from a relatively isolated corner of North America in the eighteenth century to a thriving metropolis that rivaled New York in importance (**Figure 12.5**).

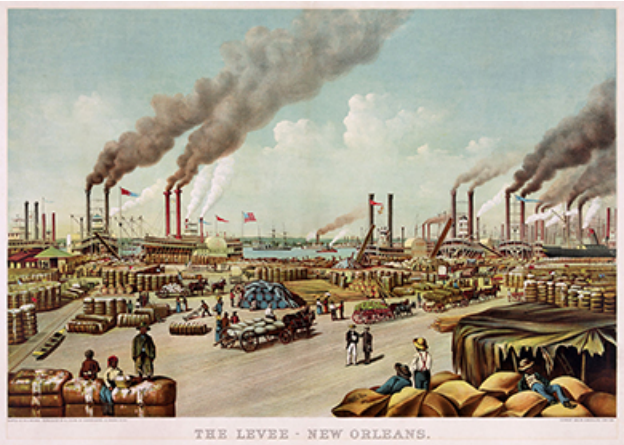

Figure 12.5 This print of *The Levee - New Orleans* (1884) shows the bustling port of New Orleans with bales of cotton waiting to be shipped. The sheer volume of cotton indicates its economic importance throughout the century.

THE DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE

The South's dependence on cotton was matched by its dependence on slaves to harvest the cotton. Despite the rhetoric of the Revolution that "all men are created equal," slavery not only endured in the American republic but formed the very foundation of the country's economic success. Cotton and slavery occupied a central—and intertwined—place in the nineteenth-century economy.

In 1807, the U.S. Congress abolished the foreign slave trade, a ban that went into effect on January 1, 1808. After this date, importing slaves from Africa became illegal in the United States. While smuggling continued to occur, the end of the international slave trade meant that domestic slaves were in very high demand. Fortunately for Americans whose wealth depended upon the exploitation of slave labor, a fall in the price of tobacco had caused landowners in the Upper South to reduce their production of this crop and use more of their land to grow wheat, which was far more profitable. While tobacco was a labor-intensive crop that required many people to cultivate it, wheat was not. Former tobacco farmers in the older states of Virginia and Maryland found themselves with "surplus" slaves whom they were obligated to feed, clothe, and shelter. Some slaveholders responded to this situation by freeing slaves; far more decided to sell their excess bondsmen. Virginia and Maryland therefore took the lead in the **domestic slave trade**, the trading of slaves within the borders of the United States.

The domestic slave trade offered many economic opportunities for white men. Those who sold their slaves could realize great profits, as could the slave brokers who served as middlemen between sellers and buyers. Other white men could benefit from the trade as owners of warehouses and pens in which slaves were held, or as suppliers of clothing and food for slaves on the move. Between 1790 and 1859, slaveholders in Virginia sold more than half a million slaves. In the early part of this period, many of these slaves were sold to people living in Kentucky, Tennessee, and North and South Carolina. By the 1820s, however, people in Kentucky and the Carolinas had begun to sell many of their slaves as well. Maryland slave dealers sold at least 185,000 slaves. Kentucky slaveholders sold some seventy-one thousand individuals. Most of the slave traders carried these slaves further south to Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. New Orleans, the hub of commerce, boasted the largest slave market in the United States and grew to become the nation's fourth-largest city as a result. Natchez, Mississippi, had the second-largest market. In Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and elsewhere in the South, slave auctions happened every day.

All told, the movement of slaves in the South made up one of the largest forced internal migrations in the United States. In each of the decades between 1820 and 1860, about 200,000 people were sold and relocated. The 1800 census recorded over one million African Americans, of which nearly 900,000 were slaves. By 1860, the total number of African Americans increased to 4.4 million, and of that number, 3.95 million were held in bondage. For many slaves, the domestic slave trade incited the terror of being sold away from family and friends.

MY STORY

Solomon Northup Remembers the New Orleans Slave Market

Solomon Northup was a free black man living in Saratoga, New York, when he was kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1841. He later escaped and wrote a book about his experiences: *Twelve Years a Slave. Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841 and Rescued in 1853* (the basis of a 2013 Academy Award–winning film). This excerpt derives from Northup's description of being sold in New Orleans, along with fellow slave Eliza and her children Randall and Emily.

> One old gentleman, who said he wanted a coachman, appeared to take a fancy to me. . . . The same man also purchased Randall. The little fellow was made to jump, and run across the floor, and perform many other feats, exhibiting his activity and condition. All the time the trade was going on, Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy him, unless he also bought her self and Emily. . . . Freeman turned round to her, savagely, with his whip in his uplifted hand, ordering her to stop her noise, or he would flog her. He would not have such work—such snivelling; and unless she ceased that minute, he would take her to the yard and give her a hundred lashes. . . . Eliza shrunk before him, and tried to wipe away her tears, but it was all in vain. She wanted to be with her children, she said, the little time she had to live. All the frowns and threats of Freeman, could not wholly silence the afflicted mother.

What does Northup's narrative tell you about the experience of being a slave? How does he characterize Freeman, the slave trader? How does he characterize Eliza?

THE SOUTH IN THE AMERICAN AND WORLD MARKETS

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a market revolution in the United States, one in which industrialization brought changes to both the production and the consumption of goods. Some southerners of the time believed that their region's reliance on a single cash crop and its use of slaves to produce it gave the South economic independence and made it immune from the effects of these changes, but this was far from the truth. Indeed, the production of cotton brought the South more firmly into the larger American and Atlantic markets. Northern mills depended on the South for supplies of raw cotton that was then

converted into textiles. But this domestic cotton market paled in comparison to the Atlantic market. About 75 percent of the cotton produced in the United States was eventually exported abroad. Exporting at such high volumes made the United States the undisputed world leader in cotton production. Between the years 1820 and 1860, approximately 80 percent of the global cotton supply was produced in the United States. Nearly all the exported cotton was shipped to Great Britain, fueling its burgeoning textile industry and making the powerful British Empire increasingly dependent on American cotton and southern slavery.

The power of cotton on the world market may have brought wealth to the South, but it also increased its economic dependence on other countries and other parts of the United States. Much of the corn and pork that slaves consumed came from farms in the West. Some of the inexpensive clothing, called "slops," and shoes worn by slaves were manufactured in the North. The North also supplied the furnishings found in the homes of both wealthy planters and members of the middle class. Many of the trappings of domestic life, such as carpets, lamps, dinnerware, upholstered furniture, books, and musical instruments—all the accoutrements of comfortable living for southern whites—were made in either the North or Europe. Southern planters also borrowed money from banks in northern cities, and in the southern summers, took advantage of the developments in transportation to travel to resorts at Saratoga, New York; Litchfield, Connecticut; and Newport, Rhode Island.

12.2 African Americans in the Antebellum United States

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss the similarities and differences in the lives of slaves and free blacks
- Describe the independent culture and customs that slaves developed

In addition to cotton, the great commodity of the antebellum South was human chattel. Slavery was the cornerstone of the southern economy. By 1850, about 3.2 million slaves labored in the United States, 1.8 million of whom worked in the cotton fields. Slaves faced arbitrary power abuses from whites; they coped by creating family and community networks. Storytelling, song, and Christianity also provided solace and allowed slaves to develop their own interpretations of their condition.

LIFE AS A SLAVE

Southern whites frequently relied upon the idea of **paternalism**—the premise that white slaveholders acted in the best interests of slaves, taking responsibility for their care, feeding, discipline, and even their Christian morality—to justify the existence of slavery. This grossly misrepresented the reality of slavery, which was, by any measure, a dehumanizing, traumatizing, and horrifying human disaster and crime against humanity. Nevertheless, slaves were hardly passive victims of their conditions; they sought and found myriad ways to resist their shackles and develop their own communities and cultures.

Slaves often used the notion of paternalism to their advantage, finding opportunities within this system to engage in acts of resistance and win a degree of freedom and autonomy. For example, some slaves played into their masters' racism by hiding their intelligence and feigning childishness and ignorance. The slaves could then slow down the workday and sabotage the system in small ways by "accidentally" breaking tools, for example; the master, seeing his slaves as unsophisticated and childlike, would believe these incidents were accidents rather than rebellions. Some slaves engaged in more dramatic forms of resistance, such as poisoning their masters slowly. Other slaves reported rebellious slaves to their masters, hoping to gain preferential treatment. Slaves who informed their masters about planned slave rebellions could often expect the slaveholder's gratitude and, perhaps, more lenient treatment. Such expectations were always tempered by the individual personality and caprice of the master.

Slaveholders used both psychological coercion and physical violence to prevent slaves from disobeying

their wishes. Often, the most efficient way to discipline slaves was to threaten to sell them. The lash, while the most common form of punishment, was effective but not efficient; whippings sometimes left slaves incapacitated or even dead. Slave masters also used punishment gear like neck braces, balls and chains, leg irons, and paddles with holes to produce blood blisters. Slaves lived in constant terror of both physical violence and separation from family and friends (**Figure 12.6**).

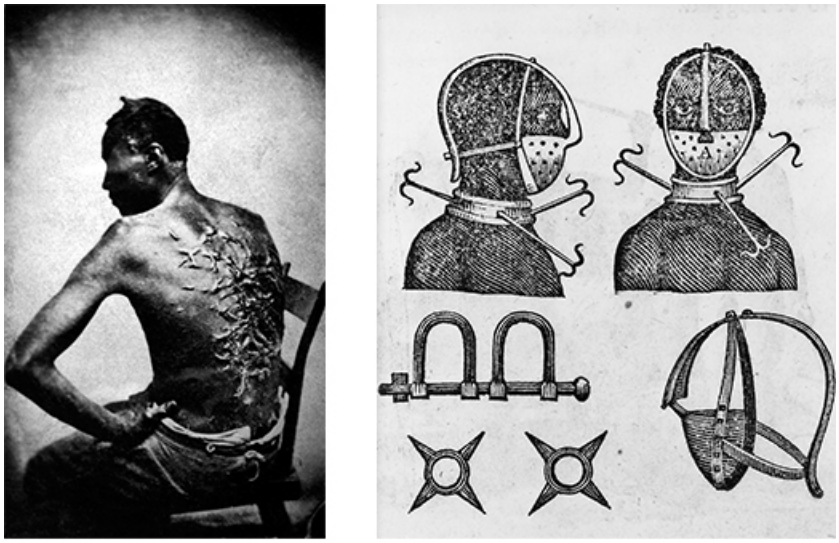

Figure 12.6 The original caption of this photograph of a slave's scarred back (a), taken in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1863, reads as follows: "*Overseer Artayou Carrier whipped me. I was two months in bed sore from the whipping. My master come after I was whipped; he discharged the overseer. The very words of poor Peter, taken as he sat for his picture.*" Images like this one helped bolster the northern abolitionist message of the inhumanity of slavery. The drawing of an iron mask, collar, leg shackles, and spurs (b) demonstrates the various cruel and painful instruments used to restrain slaves.

Under southern law, slaves could not marry. Nonetheless, some slaveholders allowed marriages to promote the birth of children and to foster harmony on plantations. Some masters even forced certain slaves to form unions, anticipating the birth of more children (and consequently greater profits) from them. Masters sometimes allowed slaves to choose their own partners, but they could also veto a match. Slave couples always faced the prospect of being sold away from each other, and, once they had children, the horrifying reality that their children could be sold and sent away at any time.

Click and Explore

Browse a collection of first-hand narratives of slaves and former slaves at the **National Humanities Center (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Enslavement)** to learn more about the experience of slavery.

Slave parents had to show their children the best way to survive under slavery. This meant teaching them to be discreet, submissive, and guarded around whites. Parents also taught their children through the stories they told. Popular stories among slaves included tales of tricksters, sly slaves, or animals like

Brer Rabbit, who outwitted their antagonists (**Figure 12.7**). Such stories provided comfort in humor and conveyed the slaves' sense of the wrongs of slavery. Slaves' work songs commented on the harshness of their life and often had double meanings—a literal meaning that whites would not find offensive and a deeper meaning for slaves.

Figure 12.7 Brer Rabbit, depicted here in an illustration from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (1881) by Joel Chandler Harris, was a trickster who outwitted his opponents.

African beliefs, including ideas about the spiritual world and the importance of African healers, survived in the South as well. Whites who became aware of non-Christian rituals among slaves labeled such practices as witchcraft. Among Africans, however, the rituals and use of various plants by respected slave healers created connections between the African past and the American South while also providing a sense of community and identity for slaves. Other African customs, including traditional naming patterns, the making of baskets, and the cultivation of certain native African plants that had been brought to the New World, also endured.

AMERICANA

African Americans and Christian Spirituals

Many slaves embraced Christianity. Their masters emphasized a scriptural message of obedience to whites and a better day awaiting slaves in heaven, but slaves focused on the uplifting message of being freed from bondage.

The styles of worship in the Methodist and Baptist churches, which emphasized emotional responses to scripture, attracted slaves to those traditions and inspired some to become preachers. Spiritual songs that referenced the Exodus (the biblical account of the Hebrews' escape from slavery in Egypt), such as "Roll, Jordan, Roll," allowed slaves to freely express messages of hope, struggle, and overcoming adversity (**Figure 12.8**).

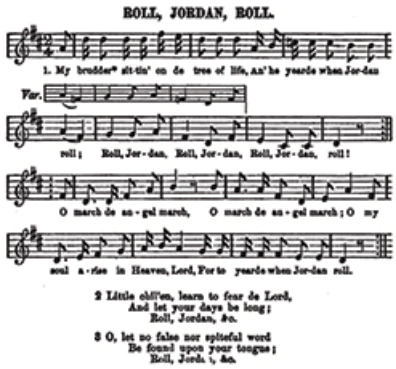

Figure 12.8 This version of "Roll, Jordan, Roll" was included in *Slave Songs of the United States*, the first published collection of African American music, which appeared in 1867.

What imagery might the Jordan River suggest to slaves working in the Deep South? What lyrics in this song suggest redemption and a better world ahead?

Click and Explore

Listen to a rendition of **"Roll, Jordan, Roll" (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15RollJordan)** from the movie based on Solomon Northup's memoir and life.

THE FREE BLACK POPULATION

Complicating the picture of the antebellum South was the existence of a large free black population. In fact, more free blacks lived in the South than in the North; roughly 261,000 lived in slave states, while 226,000 lived in northern states without slavery. Most free blacks did not live in the Lower, or Deep South: the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. Instead, the largest number lived in the upper southern states of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and later Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia.

Part of the reason for the large number of free blacks living in slave states were the many instances of

manumission—the formal granting of freedom to slaves—that occurred as a result of the Revolution, when many slaveholders put into action the ideal that "all men are created equal" and freed their slaves. The transition in the Upper South to the staple crop of wheat, which did not require large numbers of slaves to produce, also spurred manumissions. Another large group of free blacks in the South had been free residents of Louisiana before the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, while still other free blacks came from Cuba and Haiti.

Most free blacks in the South lived in cities, and a majority of free blacks were lighter-skinned women, a reflection of the interracial unions that formed between white men and black women. Everywhere in the United States blackness had come to be associated with slavery, the station at the bottom of the social ladder. Both whites and those with African ancestry tended to delineate varying degrees of lightness in skin color in a social hierarchy. In the slaveholding South, different names described one's distance from blackness or whiteness: mulattos (those with one black and one white parent), quadroons (those with one black grandparent), and octoroons (those with one black great-grandparent) (**Figure 12.9**). Lighter-skinned blacks often looked down on their darker counterparts, an indication of the ways in which both whites and blacks internalized the racism of the age.

Figure 12.9 In this late eighteenth-century painting, a free woman of color stands with her quadroon daughter in New Orleans. Families with members that had widely varying ethnic characteristics were not uncommon at the time, especially in the larger cities.

Some free blacks in the South owned slaves of their own. Andrew Durnford, for example, was born in New Orleans in 1800, three years before the Louisiana Purchase. His father was white, and his mother was a free black. Durnford became an American citizen after the Louisiana Purchase, rising to prominence as a Louisiana sugar planter and slaveholder. William Ellison, another free black who amassed great wealth and power in the South, was born a slave in 1790 in South Carolina. After buying his freedom and that of his wife and daughter, he proceeded to purchase his own slaves, whom he then put to work manufacturing cotton gins. By the eve of the Civil War, Ellison had become one of the richest and largest slaveholders in the entire state.

The phenomenon of free blacks amassing large fortunes within a slave society predicated on racial difference, however, was exceedingly rare. Most free blacks in the South lived under the specter of slavery and faced many obstacles. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, southern states increasingly made manumission of slaves illegal. They also devised laws that divested free blacks of their rights, such as the right to testify against whites in court or the right to seek employment where they pleased. Interestingly, it was in the upper southern states that such laws were the harshest. In Virginia, for example, legislators made efforts to require free blacks to leave the state. In parts of the Deep South, free blacks were able to maintain their rights more easily. The difference in treatment between free blacks in the Deep South and

those in the Upper South, historians have surmised, came down to economics. In the Deep South, slavery as an institution was strong and profitable. In the Upper South, the opposite was true. The anxiety of this economic uncertainty manifested in the form of harsh laws that targeted free blacks.

SLAVE REVOLTS

Slaves resisted their enslavement in small ways every day, but this resistance did not usually translate into mass uprisings. Slaves understood that the chances of ending slavery through rebellion were slim and would likely result in massive retaliation; many also feared the risk that participating in such actions would pose to themselves and their families. White slaveholders, however, constantly feared uprisings and took drastic steps, including torture and mutilation, whenever they believed that rebellions might be simmering. Gripped by the fear of insurrection, whites often imagined revolts to be in the works even when no uprising actually happened.

At least two major slave uprisings did occur in the antebellum South. In 1811, a major rebellion broke out in the sugar parishes of the booming territory of Louisiana. Inspired by the successful overthrow of the white planter class in Haiti, Louisiana slaves took up arms against planters. Perhaps as many five hundred slaves joined the rebellion, led by Charles Deslondes, a mixed-race slave driver on a sugar plantation owned by Manuel Andry.

The revolt began in January 1811 on Andry's plantation. Deslondes and other slaves attacked the Andry household, where they killed the slave master's son (although Andry himself escaped). The rebels then began traveling toward New Orleans, armed with weapons gathered at Andry's plantation. Whites mobilized to stop the rebellion, but not before Deslondes and the other rebelling slaves set fire to three plantations and killed numerous whites. A small white force led by Andry ultimately captured Deslondes, whose body was mutilated and burned following his execution. Other slave rebels were beheaded, and their heads placed on pikes along the Mississippi River.

The second rebellion, led by the slave Nat Turner, occurred in 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia. Turner had suffered not only from personal enslavement, but also from the additional trauma of having his wife sold away from him. Bolstered by Christianity, Turner became convinced that like Christ, he should lay down his life to end slavery. Mustering his relatives and friends, he began the rebellion August 22, killing scores of whites in the county. Whites mobilized quickly and within forty-eight hours had brought the rebellion to an end. Shocked by Nat Turner's Rebellion, Virginia's state legislature considered ending slavery in the state in order to provide greater security. In the end, legislators decided slavery would remain and that their state would continue to play a key role in the domestic slave trade.

SLAVE MARKETS

As discussed above, after centuries of slave trade with West Africa, Congress banned the further importation of slaves beginning in 1808. The domestic slave trade then expanded rapidly. As the cotton trade grew in size and importance, so did the domestic slave trade; the cultivation of cotton gave new life and importance to slavery, increasing the value of slaves. To meet the South's fierce demand for labor, American smugglers illegally transferred slaves through Florida and later through Texas. Many more slaves arrived illegally from Cuba; indeed, Cubans relied on the smuggling of slaves to prop up their finances. The largest number of slaves after 1808, however, came from the massive, legal internal slave market in which slave states in the Upper South sold enslaved men, women, and children to states in the Lower South. For slaves, the domestic trade presented the full horrors of slavery as children were ripped from their mothers and fathers and families destroyed, creating heartbreak and alienation.

Some slaveholders sought to increase the number of slave children by placing male slaves with fertile female slaves, and slave masters routinely raped their female slaves. The resulting births played an important role in slavery's expansion in the first half of the nineteenth century, as many slave children were born as a result of rape. One account written by a slave named William J. Anderson captures the horror of sexual exploitation in the antebellum South. Anderson wrote about how a Mississippi

slaveholder

> divested a poor female slave of all wearing apparel, tied her down to stakes, and whipped her with a handsaw until he broke it over her naked body. In process of time he ravished [raped] her person, and became the father of a child by her. Besides, he always kept a colored Miss in the house with him. This is another curse of Slavery—concubinage and illegitimate connections—which is carried on to an alarming extent in the far South. A poor slave man who lives close by his wife, is permitted to visit her but very seldom, and other men, both white and colored, cohabit with her. It is undoubtedly the worst place of incest and bigamy in the world. A white man thinks nothing of putting a colored man out to carry the fore row [front row in field work], and carry on the same sport with the colored man's wife at the same time.

Anderson, a devout Christian, recognized and explains in his narrative that one of the evils of slavery is the way it undermines the family. Anderson was not the only critic of slavery to emphasize this point. Frederick Douglass, a Maryland slave who escaped to the North in 1838, elaborated on this dimension of slavery in his 1845 narrative. He recounted how slave masters had to sell their own children whom they had with slave women to appease the white wives who despised their offspring.

The selling of slaves was a major business enterprise in the antebellum South, representing a key part of the economy. White men invested substantial sums in slaves, carefully calculating the annual returns they could expect from a slave as well as the possibility of greater profits through natural increase. The domestic slave trade was highly visible, and like the infamous Middle Passage that brought captive Africans to the Americas, it constituted an equally disruptive and horrifying journey now called the **second middle passage**. Between 1820 and 1860, white American traders sold a million or more slaves in the domestic slave market. Groups of slaves were transported by ship from places like Virginia, a state that specialized in raising slaves for sale, to New Orleans, where they were sold to planters in the Mississippi Valley. Other slaves made the overland trek from older states like North Carolina to new and booming Deep South states like Alabama.

New Orleans had the largest slave market in the United States (**Figure 12.10**). Slaveholders brought their slaves there from the East (Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas) and the West (Tennessee and Kentucky) to be sold for work in the Mississippi Valley. The slave trade benefited whites in the Chesapeake and Carolinas, providing them with extra income: A healthy young male slave in the 1850s could be sold for $1,000 (approximately $30,000 in 2014 dollars), and a planter who could sell ten such slaves collected a windfall.

Figure 12.10 In *Sale of Estates, Pictures and Slaves in the Rotunda, New Orleans* (1853) by J. M. Starling, it is clear that slaves are considered property to be auctioned off, just like pictures or other items.

In fact, by the 1850s, the demand for slaves reached an all-time high, and prices therefore doubled. A slave who would have sold for $400 in the 1820s could command a price of $800 in the 1850s. The high price of

slaves in the 1850s and the inability of natural increase to satisfy demands led some southerners to demand the reopening of the international slave trade, a movement that caused a rift between the Upper South and the Lower South. Whites in the Upper South who sold slaves to their counterparts in the Lower South worried that reopening the trade would lower prices and therefore hurt their profits.

MY STORY

John Brown on Slave Life in Georgia

A slave named John Brown lived in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia before he escaped and moved to England. While there, he dictated his autobiography to someone at the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, who published it in 1855.

> I really thought my mother would have died of grief at being obliged to leave her two children, her mother, and her relations behind. But it was of no use lamenting, the few things we had were put together that night, and we completed our preparations for being parted for life by kissing one another over and over again, and saying good bye till some of us little ones fell asleep. . . . And here I may as well tell what kind of man our new master was. He was of small stature, and thin, but very strong. He had sandy hair, a very red face, and chewed tobacco. His countenance had a very cruel expression, and his disposition was a match for it. He was, indeed, a very bad man, and used to flog us dreadfully. He would make his slaves work on one meal a day, until quite night, and after supper, set them to burn brush or spin cotton. We worked from four in the morning till twelve before we broke our fast, and from that time till eleven or twelve at night . . . we labored eighteen hours a day.
> —John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Now in England*, 1855

What features of the domestic slave trade does Brown's narrative illuminate? Why do you think he brought his story to an antislavery society? How do you think people responded to this narrative?

Click and Explore

Read through several narratives at "Born in Slavery," part of the **American Memory (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15BornSlavery)** collection at the Library of Congress. Do these narratives have anything in common? What differences can you find between them?

12.3 Wealth and Culture in the South

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Assess the distribution of wealth in the antebellum South
- Describe the southern culture of honor
- Identify the main proslavery arguments in the years prior to the Civil War

During the antebellum years, wealthy southern planters formed an elite master class that wielded most of the economic and political power of the region. They created their own standards of gentility and

honor, defining ideals of southern white manhood and womanhood and shaping the culture of the South. To defend the system of forced labor on which their economic survival and genteel lifestyles depended, elite southerners developed several proslavery arguments that they levied at those who would see the institution dismantled.

SLAVERY AND THE WHITE CLASS STRUCTURE

The South prospered, but its wealth was very unequally distributed. Upward social mobility did not exist for the millions of slaves who produced a good portion of the nation's wealth, while poor southern whites envisioned a day when they might rise enough in the world to own slaves of their own. Because of the cotton boom, there were more millionaires per capita in the Mississippi River Valley by 1860 than anywhere else in the United States. However, in that same year, only 3 percent of whites owned more than fifty slaves, and two-thirds of white households in the South did not own any slaves at all (**Figure 12.11**). Distribution of wealth in the South became less democratic over time; fewer whites owned slaves in 1860 than in 1840.

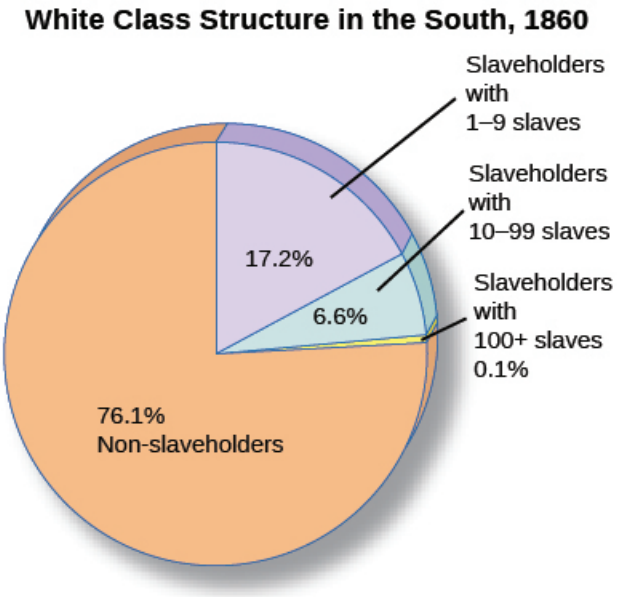

Figure 12.11 As the wealth of the antebellum South increased, it also became more unequally distributed, and an ever-smaller percentage of slaveholders held a substantial number of slaves.

At the top of southern white society stood the planter elite, which comprised two groups. In the Upper South, an aristocratic gentry, generation upon generation of whom had grown up with slavery, held a privileged place. In the Deep South, an elite group of slaveholders gained new wealth from cotton. Some members of this group hailed from established families in the eastern states (Virginia and the Carolinas), while others came from humbler backgrounds. South Carolinian Nathaniel Heyward, a wealthy rice planter and member of the aristocratic gentry, came from an established family and sat atop the pyramid of southern slaveholders. He amassed an enormous estate; in 1850, he owned more than eighteen hundred slaves. When he died in 1851, he left an estate worth more than $2 million (approximately $63 million in 2014 dollars).

As cotton production increased, new wealth flowed to the cotton planters. These planters became the staunchest defenders of slavery, and as their wealth grew, they gained considerable political power.

One member of the planter elite was Edward Lloyd V, who came from an established and wealthy family of Talbot County, Maryland. Lloyd had inherited his position rather than rising to it through his own labors. His hundreds of slaves formed a crucial part of his wealth. Like many of the planter elite, Lloyd's

plantation was a masterpiece of elegant architecture and gardens (**Figure 12.12**).

Figure 12.12 The grand house of Edward Lloyd V advertised the status and wealth of its owner. In its heyday, the Lloyd family's plantation boasted holdings of forty-two thousand acres and one thousand slaves.

One of the slaves on Lloyd's plantation was Frederick Douglass, who escaped in 1838 and became an abolitionist leader, writer, statesman, and orator in the North. In his autobiography, Douglass described the plantation's elaborate gardens and racehorses, but also its underfed and brutalized slave population. Lloyd provided employment opportunities to other whites in Talbot County, many of whom served as slave traders and the "slave breakers" entrusted with beating and overworking unruly slaves into submission. Like other members of the planter elite, Lloyd himself served in a variety of local and national political offices. He was governor of Maryland from 1809 to 1811, a member of the House of Representatives from 1807 to 1809, and a senator from 1819 to 1826. As a representative and a senator, Lloyd defended slavery as the foundation of the American economy.

Wealthy plantation owners like Lloyd came close to forming an American ruling class in the years before the Civil War. They helped shape foreign and domestic policy with one goal in view: to expand the power and reach of the cotton kingdom of the South. Socially, they cultivated a refined manner and believed whites, especially members of their class, should not perform manual labor. Rather, they created an identity for themselves based on a world of leisure in which horse racing and entertainment mattered greatly, and where the enslavement of others was the bedrock of civilization.

Below the wealthy planters were the yeoman farmers, or small landowners (**Figure 12.13**). Below yeomen were poor, landless whites, who made up the majority of whites in the South. These landless white men dreamed of owning land and slaves and served as slave overseers, drivers, and traders in the southern economy. In fact, owning land and slaves provided one of the only opportunities for upward social and economic mobility. In the South, living the American dream meant possessing slaves, producing cotton, and owning land.

Figure 12.13 In this painting by Felix Octavius Carr Darley, a yeoman farmer carrying a scythe follows his livestock down the road.

Despite this unequal distribution of wealth, non-slaveholding whites shared with white planters a common set of values, most notably a belief in white supremacy. Whites, whether rich or poor, were bound together by racism. Slavery defused class tensions among them, because no matter how poor they were, white southerners had race in common with the mighty plantation owners. Non-slaveholders accepted the rule of the planters as defenders of their shared interest in maintaining a racial hierarchy. Significantly, all whites were also bound together by the constant, prevailing fear of slave uprisings.

MY STORY

D. R. Hundley on the Southern Yeoman

D. R. Hundley was a well-educated planter, lawyer, and banker from Alabama. Something of an amateur sociologist, he argued against the common northern assumption that the South was made up exclusively of two tiers of white residents: the very wealthy planter class and the very poor landless whites. In his 1860 book, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, Hundley describes what he calls the "Southern Yeomen," a social group he insists is roughly equivalent to the middle-class farmers of the North.

> *But you have no Yeomen in the South, my dear Sir?* Beg your pardon, our dear Sir, but we have—hosts of them. *I thought you had only poor White Trash?* Yes, we dare say as much—and that the moon is made of green cheese! . . . Know, then, that the Poor Whites of the South constitute a separate class to themselves; the Southern Yeomen are as distinct from them as the Southern Gentleman is from the Cotton Snob. Certainly the Southern Yeomen are nearly always poor, at least so far as this world's goods are to be taken into account. As a general thing they own no slaves; and even in case they do, the wealthiest of them rarely possess more than from ten to fifteen. . . . The Southern Yeoman much resembles in his speech, religious opinions, household arrangements, indoor sports, and family traditions, the middle class farmers of the Northern States. He is fully as intelligent as the latter, and is on the whole much better versed in the lore of politics and the provisions of our Federal and State Constitutions. . . . [A]lthough not as a class pecuniarily interested in slave property, the Southern Yeomanry are almost unanimously pro-slavery in sentiment. Nor do we see how any honest, thoughtful person can reasonably find fault with them on this account.
>
> —D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 1860

What elements of social relations in the South is Hundley attempting to emphasize for his readers? In what respects might his position as an educated and wealthy planter influence his understanding of social relations in the South?

Because race bound all whites together as members of the master race, non-slaveholding whites took part in civil duties. They served on juries and voted. They also engaged in the daily rounds of maintaining slavery by serving on neighborhood patrols to ensure that slaves did not escape and that rebellions did not occur. The practical consequence of such activities was that the institution of slavery, and its perpetuation, became a source of commonality among different economic and social tiers that otherwise were separated by a gulf of difference.

Southern planters exerted a powerful influence on the federal government. Seven of the first eleven presidents owned slaves, and more than half of the Supreme Court justices who served on the court from its inception to the Civil War came from slaveholding states. However, southern white yeoman farmers generally did not support an active federal government. They were suspicious of the state bank and supported President Jackson's dismantling of the Second Bank of the United States. They also did not support taxes to create internal improvements such as canals and railroads; to them, government involvement in the economic life of the nation disrupted what they perceived as the natural workings of the economy. They also feared a strong national government might tamper with slavery.

Planters operated within a larger capitalist society, but the labor system they used to produce goods—that is, slavery—was similar to systems that existed before capitalism, such as feudalism and serfdom. Under capitalism, free workers are paid for their labor (by owners of capital) to produce commodities; the money from the sale of the goods is used to pay for the work performed. As slaves did not reap any earnings from their forced labor, some economic historians consider the antebellum plantation system a "pre-capitalist" system.

HONOR IN THE SOUTH

A complicated code of honor among privileged white southerners, dictating the beliefs and behavior of "gentlemen" and "ladies," developed in the antebellum years. Maintaining appearances and reputation was supremely important. It can be argued that, as in many societies, the concept of honor in the antebellum South had much to do with control over dependents, whether slaves, wives, or relatives. Defending their honor and ensuring that they received proper respect became preoccupations of whites in the slaveholding South. To question another man's assertions was to call his honor and reputation into question. Insults in the form of words or behavior, such as calling someone a coward, could trigger a rupture that might well end on the dueling ground (**Figure 12.14**). Dueling had largely disappeared in the antebellum North by the early nineteenth century, but it remained an important part of the southern code of honor through the Civil War years. Southern white men, especially those of high social status, settled their differences with duels, before which antagonists usually attempted reconciliation, often through the exchange of letters addressing the alleged insult. If the challenger was not satisfied by the exchange, a duel would often result.

Figure 12.14 "The Modern Tribunal and Arbiter of Men's Differences," an illustration that appeared on the cover of *The Mascot*, a newspaper published in nineteenth-century New Orleans, reveals the importance of dueling in southern culture; it shows men bowing before an altar on which are laid a pistol and knife.

The dispute between South Carolina's James Hammond and his erstwhile friend (and brother-in-law) Wade Hampton II illustrates the southern culture of honor and the place of the duel in that culture. A strong friendship bound Hammond and Hampton together. Both stood at the top of South Carolina's society as successful, married plantation owners involved in state politics. Prior to his election as governor of the state in 1842, Hammond became sexually involved with each of Hampton's four teenage daughters, who were his nieces by marriage. "[A]ll of them rushing on every occasion into my arms," Hammond confided in his private diary, "covering me with kisses, lolling on my lap, pressing their bodies almost into mine . . . and permitting my hands to stray unchecked." Hampton found out about these dalliances, and in keeping with the code of honor, could have demanded a duel with Hammond. However, Hampton instead tried to use the liaisons to destroy his former friend politically. This effort proved disastrous for Hampton, because it represented a violation of the southern code of honor. "As matters now stand," Hammond wrote, "he [Hampton] is a convicted dastard who, not having nerve to redress his own wrongs, put forward bullies to do it for him. . . . To challenge me [to a duel] would be to throw himself upon my mercy for he knows I am not bound to meet him [for a duel]." Because Hampton's behavior marked him as a man who lacked honor, Hammond was no longer bound to meet Hampton in a duel even if Hampton were to demand one. Hammond's reputation, though tarnished, remained high in the esteem of South Carolinians, and the governor went on to serve as a U.S. senator from 1857 to 1860. As for the four Hampton daughters, they never married; their names were disgraced, not only by the whispered-about scandal but by their father's actions in response to it; and no man of honor in South Carolina would stoop so low as to marry them.

GENDER AND THE SOUTHERN HOUSEHOLD

The antebellum South was an especially male-dominated society. Far more than in the North, southern men, particularly wealthy planters, were patriarchs and sovereigns of their own household. Among the white members of the household, labor and daily ritual conformed to rigid gender delineations. Men represented their household in the larger world of politics, business, and war. Within the family, the patriarchal male was the ultimate authority. White women were relegated to the household and lived under the thumb and protection of the male patriarch. The ideal southern lady conformed to her prescribed gender role, a role that was largely domestic and subservient. While responsibilities and experiences varied across different social tiers, women's subordinate state in relation to the male patriarch

remained the same.

Writers in the antebellum period were fond of celebrating the image of the ideal southern woman (**Figure 12.15**). One such writer, Thomas Roderick Dew, president of Virginia's College of William and Mary in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote approvingly of the virtue of southern women, a virtue he concluded derived from their natural weakness, piety, grace, and modesty. In his *Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences Between the Sexes*, he writes that southern women derive their power not by

> leading armies to combat, or of enabling her to bring into more formidable action the physical power which nature has conferred on her. No! It is but the better to perfect all those feminine graces, all those fascinating attributes, which render her the center of attraction, and which delight and charm all those who breathe the atmosphere in which she moves; and, in the language of Mr. Burke, would make ten thousand swords leap from their scabbards to avenge the insult that might be offered to her. By her very meekness and beauty does she subdue all around her.

Such popular idealizations of elite southern white women, however, are difficult to reconcile with their lived experience: in their own words, these women frequently described the trauma of childbirth, the loss of children, and the loneliness of the plantation.

Figure 12.15 This cover illustration from *Harper's Weekly* in 1861 shows the ideal of southern womanhood.

MY STORY

Louisa Cheves McCord's "Woman's Progress"

Louisa Cheves McCord was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1810. A child of some privilege in the South, she received an excellent education and became a prolific writer. As the excerpt from her poem "Woman's Progress" indicates, some southern women also contributed to the idealization of southern white womanhood.

> Sweet Sister! stoop not thou to be a man!
> Man has his place as woman hers; and she
> As made to comfort, minister and help;
> Moulded for gentler duties, ill fulfils
> His jarring destinies. Her mission is
> To labour and to pray; to help, to heal,
> To soothe, to bear; patient, with smiles, to suffer;
> And with self-abnegation noble lose
> Her private interest in the dearer weal
> Of those she loves and lives for. Call not this—
> (The all-fulfilling of her destiny;
> She the world's soothing mother)—call it not,
> With scorn and mocking sneer, a drudgery.
> The ribald tongue profanes Heaven's holiest things,
> But holy still they are. The lowliest tasks
> Are sanctified in nobly acting them.
> Christ washed the apostles' feet, not thus cast shame
> Upon the God-like in him. 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 Susanna Cheves McCord, "Woman's Progress," 1853

What womanly virtues does Louisa Cheves McCord emphasize? How might her social status, as an educated southern woman of great privilege, influence her understanding of gender relations in the South?

For slaveholding whites, the male-dominated household operated to protect gendered divisions and prevalent gender norms; for slave women, however, the same system exposed them to brutality and frequent sexual domination. The demands on the labor of slave women made it impossible for them to perform the role of domestic caretaker that was so idealized by southern men. That slaveholders put them out into the fields, where they frequently performed work traditionally thought of as male, reflected little the ideal image of gentleness and delicacy reserved for white women. Nor did the slave woman's role as daughter, wife, or mother garner any patriarchal protection. Each of these roles and the relationships they defined was subject to the prerogative of a master, who could freely violate enslaved women's persons, sell off their children, or separate them from their families.

DEFENDING SLAVERY

With the rise of democracy during the Jacksonian era in the 1830s, slaveholders worried about the power of the majority. If political power went to a majority that was hostile to slavery, the South—and the honor of white southerners—would be imperiled. White southerners keen on preserving the institution of slavery bristled at what they perceived to be northern attempts to deprive them of their livelihood. Powerful southerners like South Carolinian John C. Calhoun (**Figure 12.16**) highlighted laws like the Tariff of

1828 as evidence of the North's desire to destroy the southern economy and, by extension, its culture. Such a tariff, he and others concluded, would disproportionately harm the South, which relied heavily on imports, and benefit the North, which would receive protections for its manufacturing centers. The tariff appeared to open the door for other federal initiatives, including the abolition of slavery. Because of this perceived threat to southern society, Calhoun argued that states could nullify federal laws. This belief illustrated the importance of the states' rights argument to the southern states. It also showed slaveholders' willingness to unite against the federal government when they believed it acted unjustly against their interests.

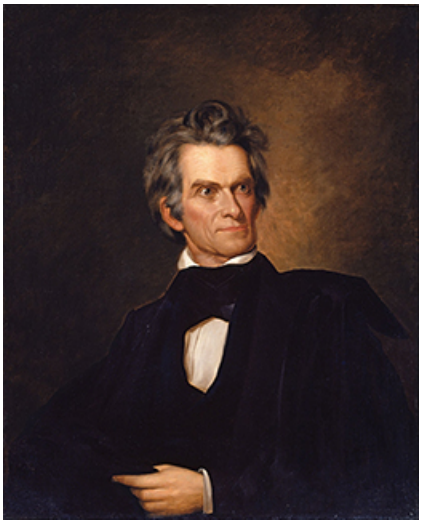

Figure 12.16 John C. Calhoun, shown here in a ca. 1845 portrait by George Alexander Healy, defended states' rights, especially the right of the southern states to protect slavery from a hostile northern majority.

As the nation expanded in the 1830s and 1840s, the writings of abolitionists—a small but vocal group of northerners committed to ending slavery—reached a larger national audience. White southerners responded by putting forth arguments in defense of slavery, their way of life, and their honor. Calhoun became a leading political theorist defending slavery and the rights of the South, which he saw as containing an increasingly embattled minority. He advanced the idea of a **concurrent majority**, a majority of a separate region (that would otherwise be in the minority of the nation) with the power to veto or disallow legislation put forward by a hostile majority.

Calhoun's idea of the concurrent majority found full expression in his 1850 essay "Disquisition on Government." In this treatise, he wrote about government as a necessary means to ensure the preservation of society, since society existed to "preserve and protect our race." If government grew hostile to society, then a concurrent majority had to take action, including forming a new government. "Disquisition on Government" advanced a profoundly anti-democratic argument. It illustrates southern leaders' intense suspicion of democratic majorities and their ability to effect legislation that would challenge southern interests.

Click and Explore

Go to the **Internet Archive (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Disquisition)** to read John C. Calhoun's "Disquisition on Government." Why do you think he proposed the creation of a concurrent majority?

White southerners reacted strongly to abolitionists' attacks on slavery. In making their defense of slavery, they critiqued wage labor in the North. They argued that the Industrial Revolution had brought about a new type of slavery—wage slavery—and that this form of "slavery" was far worse than the slave labor used on southern plantations. Defenders of the institution also lashed out directly at abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison for daring to call into question their way of life. Indeed, Virginians cited Garrison as the instigator of Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion.

The Virginian George Fitzhugh contributed to the defense of slavery with his book *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (1854). Fitzhugh argued that laissez-faire capitalism, as celebrated by Adam Smith, benefited only the quick-witted and intelligent, leaving the ignorant at a huge disadvantage. Slaveholders, he argued, took care of the ignorant—in Fitzhugh's argument, the slaves of the South. Southerners provided slaves with care from birth to death, he asserted; this offered a stark contrast to the wage slavery of the North, where workers were at the mercy of economic forces beyond their control. Fitzhugh's ideas exemplified southern notions of paternalism.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

George Fitzhugh's Defense of Slavery

George Fitzhugh, a southern writer of social treatises, was a staunch supporter of slavery, not as a necessary evil but as what he argued was a necessary good, a way to take care of slaves and keep them from being a burden on society. He published *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* in 1854, in which he laid out what he believed to be the benefits of slavery to both the slaves and society as a whole. According to Fitzhugh:

> [I]t is clear the Athenian democracy would not suit a negro nation, nor will the government of mere law suffice for the individual negro. He is but a grown up child and must be governed as a child . . . The master occupies towards him the place of parent or guardian. . . . The negro is improvident; will not lay up in summer for the wants of winter; will not accumulate in youth for the exigencies of age. He would become an insufferable burden to society. Society has the right to prevent this, and can only do so by subjecting him to domestic slavery.
>
> In the last place, the negro race is inferior to the white race, and living in their midst, they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chase of free competition. . . . Our negroes are not only better off as to physical comfort than free laborers, but their moral condition is better.

What arguments does Fitzhugh use to promote slavery? What basic premise underlies his ideas? Can you think of a modern parallel to Fitzhugh's argument?

The North also produced defenders of slavery, including Louis Agassiz, a Harvard professor of zoology and geology. Agassiz helped to popularize **polygenism**, the idea that different human races came from separate origins. According to this formulation, no single human family origin existed, and blacks made up a race wholly separate from the white race. Agassiz's notion gained widespread popularity in the 1850s

with the 1854 publication of George Gliddon and Josiah Nott's *Types of Mankind* and other books. The theory of polygenism codified racism, giving the notion of black inferiority the lofty mantle of science. One popular advocate of the idea posited that blacks occupied a place in evolution between the Greeks and chimpanzees (**Figure 12.17**).

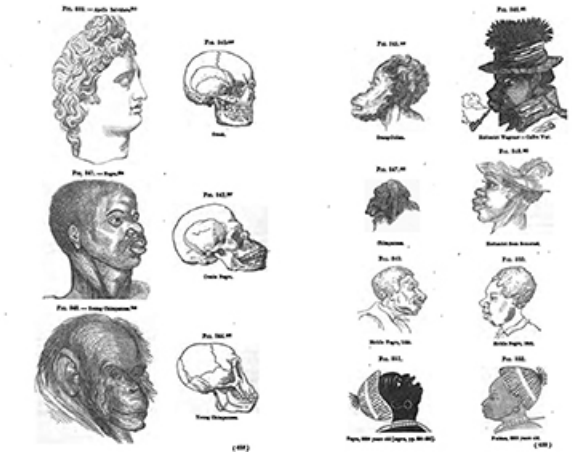

Figure 12.17 This 1857 illustration by an advocate of polygenism indicates that the "Negro" occupies a place between the Greeks and chimpanzees. What does this image reveal about the methods of those who advocated polygenism?

12.4 The Filibuster and the Quest for New Slave States

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the expansionist goals of advocates of slavery
- Describe the filibuster expeditions undertaken during the antebellum era

Southern expansionists had spearheaded the drive to add more territory to the United States. They applauded the Louisiana Purchase and fervently supported Indian removal, the annexation of Texas, and the Mexican-American War. Drawing inspiration from the annexation of Texas, proslavery expansionists hoped to replicate that feat by bringing Cuba and other territories into the United States and thereby enlarging the American empire of slavery.

In the 1850s, the expansionist drive among white southerners intensified. Among southern imperialists, one way to push for the creation of an American empire of slavery was through the actions of filibusters—men who led unofficial military operations intended to seize land from foreign countries or foment revolution there. These unsanctioned military adventures were not part of the official foreign policy of the United States; American citizens simply formed themselves into private armies to forcefully annex new land without the government's approval.

An 1818 federal law made it a crime to undertake such adventures, which was an indication of both the reality of efforts at expansion through these illegal expeditions and the government's effort to create a U.S. foreign policy. Nonetheless, Americans continued to filibuster throughout the nineteenth century. In 1819, an expedition of two hundred Americans invaded Spanish Texas, intent on creating a republic modeled on the United States, only to be driven out by Spanish forces. Using force, taking action, and asserting white supremacy in these militaristic drives were seen by many as an ideal of American male vigor. President Jackson epitomized this military prowess as an officer in the Tennessee militia, where earlier in the century he had played a leading role in ending the Creek War and driving Indian peoples out of Alabama and Georgia. His reputation helped him to win the presidency in 1828 and again in 1832.

Filibustering plots picked up pace in the 1850s as the drive for expansion continued. Slaveholders looked south to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America, hoping to add new slave states. Spanish Cuba became the objective of many American slaveholders in the 1850s, as debate over the island dominated the national conversation. Many who urged its annexation believed Cuba had to be made part of the United States to prevent it from going the route of Haiti, with black slaves overthrowing their masters and creating another black republic, a prospect horrifying to many in the United States. Americans also feared that the British, who had an interest in the sugar island, would make the first move and snatch Cuba from the United States. Since Britain had outlawed slavery in its colonies in 1833, blacks on the island of Cuba would then be free.

Narciso López, a Venezuelan who wanted to end Spanish control of the island, gained American support. He tried five times to take the island, with his last effort occurring in the summer of 1851 when he led an armed group from New Orleans. Thousands came out to cheer his small force as they set off to wrest Cuba from the Spanish. Unfortunately for López and his supporters, however, the effort to take Cuba did not produce the hoped-for spontaneous uprising of the Cuban people. Spanish authorities in Cuba captured and executed López and the American filibusters.

Efforts to take Cuba continued under President Franklin Pierce, who had announced at his inauguration in 1853 his intention to pursue expansion. In 1854, American diplomats met in Ostend, Belgium, to find a way to gain Cuba. They wrote a secret memo, known as the **Ostend Manifesto** (thought to be penned by James Buchanan, who was elected president two years later), stating that if Spain refused to sell Cuba to the United States, the United States was justified in taking the island as a national security measure.

The contents of this memo were supposed to remain secret, but details were leaked to the public, leading the House of Representatives to demand a copy. Many in the North were outraged over what appeared to be a southern scheme, orchestrated by what they perceived as the Slave Power—a term they used to describe the disproportionate influence that elite slaveholders wielded—to expand slavery. European powers also reacted with anger. Southern annexationists, however, applauded the effort to take Cuba. The Louisiana legislature in 1854 asked the federal government to take decisive action, and John Quitman, a former Mississippi governor, raised money from slaveholders to fund efforts to take the island.

Click and Explore

Read an 1860 editorial titled **Annexation of Cuba Made Easy (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15AnnexCuba)** from the online archives of *The New York Times*. Does the author support annexation? Why or why not?

Controversy around the Ostend Manifesto caused President Pierce to step back from the plan to take Cuba. After his election, President Buchanan, despite his earlier expansionist efforts, denounced filibustering as the action of pirates. Filibustering caused an even wider gulf between the North and the South (**Figure 12.18**).

Figure 12.18 *The "Ostend Doctrine"* (1856), by artist Louis Maurer and lithographer Nathaniel Currier, mocks James Buchanan by depicting him being robbed, just as many northerners believed slaveholders were attempting to rob Spain. The thugs robbing Buchanan use specific phrases from the Ostend Manifesto as they relieve him of his belongings.

Cuba was not the only territory in slaveholders' expansionist sights: some focused on Mexico and Central America. In 1855, Tennessee-born William Walker, along with an army of no more than sixty mercenaries, gained control of the Central American nation of Nicaragua. Previously, Walker had launched a successful invasion of Mexico, dubbing his conquered land the Republic of Sonora. In a relatively short period of time, Walker was dislodged from Sonora by Mexican authorities and forced to retreat back to the United States. His conquest of Nicaragua garnered far more attention, catapulting him into national popularity as the heroic embodiment of white supremacy (**Figure 12.19**).

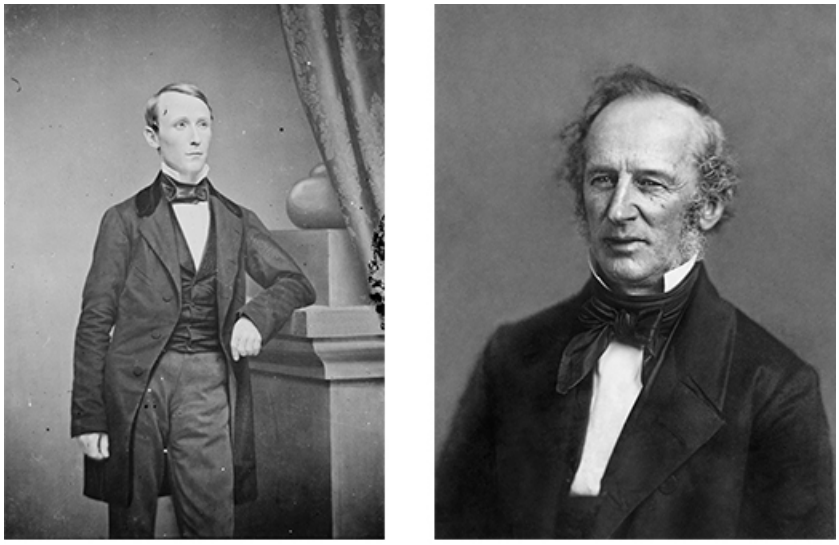

Figure 12.19 Famed Civil War photographer Mathew Brady took this photograph (a) of "General" William Walker circa 1855–1860. Walker led a filibuster expedition and briefly conquered Nicaragua, fulfilling a dream of many pro-expansionist southern slaveholders. Cornelius Vanderbilt (b), the shipping tycoon who controlled much of the traffic across Nicaragua between the Atlantic and the Pacific, clashed with Walker and ultimately supported Costa Rica in its war against him.

Why Nicaragua? Nicaragua presented a tempting target because it provided a quick route from the Caribbean to the Pacific: Only twelve miles of land stood between the Pacific Ocean, the inland Lake

Nicaragua, and the river that drained into the Atlantic. Shipping from the East Coast to the West Coast of the United States had to travel either by land across the continent, south around the entire continent of South America, or through Nicaragua. Previously, American tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt (**Figure 12.19**) had recognized the strategic importance of Nicaragua and worked with the Nicaraguan government to control shipping there. The filibustering of William Walker may have excited expansionist-minded southerners, but it greatly upset Vanderbilt's business interests in the region.

Walker clung to the racist, expansionist philosophies of the proslavery South. In 1856, Walker made slavery legal in Nicaragua—it had been illegal there for thirty years—in a move to gain the support of the South. He also reopened the slave trade. In 1856, he was elected president of Nicaragua, but in 1857, he was chased from the country. When he returned to Central America in 1860, he was captured by the British and released to Honduran authorities, who executed him by firing squad.

Key Terms

antebellum a term meaning "before the war" and used to describe the decades before the American Civil War began in 1861

cash crop a crop grown to be sold for profit instead of consumption by the farmer's family

concurrent majority a majority of a separate region (that would otherwise be in the minority of the nation) with the power to veto or disallow legislation put forward by a hostile majority

cotton boom the upswing in American cotton production during the nineteenth century

cotton gin a device, patented by Eli Whitney in 1794, that separated the seeds from raw cotton quickly and easily

domestic slave trade the trading of slaves within the borders of the United States

Ostend Manifesto the secret diplomatic memo stating that if Spain refused to sell Cuba to the United States, the United States was justified in taking the island as a national security measure

paternalism the premise that southern white slaveholders acted in the best interests of their slaves

polygenism the idea that blacks and whites come from different origins

second middle passage the internal forced migration of slaves to the South and West in the United States

Summary

12.1 The Economics of Cotton

In the years before the Civil War, the South produced the bulk of the world's supply of cotton. The Mississippi River Valley slave states became the epicenter of cotton production, an area of frantic economic activity where the landscape changed dramatically as land was transformed from pinewoods and swamps into cotton fields. Cotton's profitability relied on the institution of slavery, which generated the product that fueled cotton mill profits in the North. When the international slave trade was outlawed in 1808, the domestic slave trade exploded, providing economic opportunities for whites involved in many aspects of the trade and increasing the possibility of slaves' dislocation and separation from kin and friends. Although the larger American and Atlantic markets relied on southern cotton in this era, the South depended on these other markets for food, manufactured goods, and loans. Thus, the market revolution transformed the South just as it had other regions.

12.2 African Americans in the Antebellum United States

Slave labor in the antebellum South generated great wealth for plantation owners. Slaves, in contrast, endured daily traumas as the human property of masters. Slaves resisted their condition in a variety of ways, and many found some solace in Christianity and the communities they created in the slave quarters. While some free blacks achieved economic prosperity and even became slaveholders themselves, the vast majority found themselves restricted by the same white-supremacist assumptions upon which the institution of slavery was based.

12.3 Wealth and Culture in the South

Although a small white elite owned the vast majority of slaves in the South, and most other whites could only aspire to slaveholders' wealth and status, slavery shaped the social life of all white southerners in profound ways. Southern culture valued a behavioral code in which men's honor, based on the domination of others and the protection of southern white womanhood, stood as the highest good. Slavery also decreased class tensions, binding whites together on the basis of race despite their inequalities of wealth. Several defenses of slavery were prevalent in the antebellum era, including Calhoun's argument that the South's "concurrent majority" could overrule federal legislation deemed hostile to southern interests; the notion that slaveholders' care of their chattel made slaves better off than wage workers in the North; and the profoundly racist ideas underlying polygenism.

12.4 The Filibuster and the Quest for New Slave States

The decade of the 1850s witnessed various schemes to expand the American empire of slavery. The Ostend Manifesto articulated the right of the United States to forcefully seize Cuba if Spain would not sell it, while filibuster expeditions attempted to annex new slave states without the benefit of governmental approval. Those who pursued the goal of expanding American slavery believed they embodied the true spirit of white racial superiority.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following was *not* one of the effects of the cotton boom?

A. U.S. trade increased with France and Spain.
B. Northern manufacturing expanded.
C. The need for slave labor grew.
D. Port cities like New Orleans expanded.

2. The abolition of the foreign slave trade in 1807 led to _____.

A. a dramatic decrease in the price and demand for slaves
B. the rise of a thriving domestic slave trade
C. a reform movement calling for the complete end to slavery in the United States
D. the decline of cotton production

3. Why did some southerners believe their region was immune to the effects of the market revolution? Why was this thinking misguided?

4. Under the law in the antebellum South, slaves were _____.

A. servants
B. animals
C. property
D. indentures

5. How did both slaveholders and slaves use the concept of paternalism to their advantage?

6. The largest group of whites in the South _____.

A. owned no slaves
B. owned between one and nine slaves each
C. owned between ten and ninety-nine slaves each
D. owned over one hundred slaves each

7. John C. Calhoun argued for greater rights for southerners with which idea?

A. polygenism
B. nullification
C. concurrent majority
D. paternalism

8. How did defenders of slavery use the concept of paternalism to structure their ideas?

9. Why did southern expansionists conduct filibuster expeditions?

A. to gain political advantage
B. to annex new slave states
C. to prove they could raise an army
D. to map unknown territories

10. The controversy at the heart of the Ostend Manifesto centered on the fate of:

A. Ostend, Belgium
B. Nicaragua
C. Cuba
D. Louisiana

11. Why did expansionists set their sights on the annexation of Spanish Cuba?

Critical Thinking Questions

12. Compare and contrast the steamboats of the antebellum years with technologies today. In your estimation, what modern technology compares to steamboats in its transformative power?

13. Does the history of the cotton kingdom support or undermine the Jeffersonian vision of white farmers on self-sufficient farms? Explain your answer.

14. Based on your reading of William J. Anderson's and John Brown's accounts, what types of traumas did slaves experience? How were the experiences of black women and men similar and different?

15. What strategies did slaves employ to resist, revolt, and sustain their own independent communities and cultures? How did slaves use white southerners' own philosophies—paternalism and Christianity, for example—to their advantage in these efforts?

16. What are the major arguments put forward by proslavery advocates? How would you argue against their statements?

17. Consider filibustering from the point of view of the Cuban or Nicaraguan people. If you lived in Cuba or Nicaragua, would you support filibustering? Why or why not?