

Social Groups of the South & the Southern Economy

Slavery by the Numbers

By 1860:

- 1/4 of all white families in the South owned slaves
- 1/2 owned fewer than 5 slaves
- 3/4 had fewer than 10 slaves
- only 12% owned 20 or more slaves
- only 1% had 100 or more slaves

Southerners Generally divided into 4 main groups:

1. Planters

- a. owned 20 or more slaves
- b. needed more than 20 to run plantation
- c. dominated low regions and delta of south
- d. dealt with merchants and lawyers who depended upon them
- e. slave traders relied upon them
- f. plantations incorporated high degree of division of labor
- g. often owned 500 or more acres
- h. 1850 Bellmead:
 - i. tobacco plantation on VA James River
 - ii. more than 100 slaves
 - iii. agricultural equivalent of a factory village
 - iv. domestic staff (butlers, waiters, seamstresses, laundresses, maids & gardeners)
 - v. pasture staff (shepherds, cowherds, & hog drivers)
 - vi. outdoor artisans (stonemasons & carpenters)
 - vii. indoor artisans (blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, spinners & weavers)
 - viii. field hands
 - ix. immense income of \$20,000 - \$30,000 per year
- i. most plantations not "Tara"
- j. constantly worried about profitability
- k. fixed costs were considerable:
 - i. hiring overseers
 - ii. housing & feeding slaves
 - iii. maintaining cotton gin & equipment
- l. indebtedness became a way of life
- m. psychological strains on women
 - i. moving for new land
 - ii. West was a fall from grace for wives
 - iii. bereft of white social peers
 - iv. husbands traveled scouting for new land
 - v. raise children & entertain guests
 - vi. supervised house slaves
 - vii. made carpets & clothes
 - viii. kept plantation accounts
 - ix. dealt with husbands infidelities - humiliation
 - x. realized wealth & position depended upon slavery

2. Small Slaveholders

- a. owned fewer than 20 slaves

- b. obvious difference between owner of 10 – 19 & one who owned < 5
 - c. by 1860 - 88% of slaveholders owned less than 20 slaves
 - d. most owned less than 10
 - e. essentially family farmers
 - f. some owners not even farmers
 - g. usually younger than planters
3. Yeoman
- a. Non-slaveholding family farmers
 - b. Largest single group of southern whites
 - c. Most were landowners
 - d. Dominant in hilly, upland regions
 - e. Frequently hired slaves at harvest time
 - f. Most grew crops for the market
 - g. Some subsistence farmers
 - h. Most landowners in range of 50 – 200 acres
 - i. Valued self-sufficiency with modest profit
 - j. Often dismissed as “poor white trash” by planters
 - k. Fathers & sons
 - i. cleared & plowed land
 - ii. planted
 - iii. hoed the fields
 - l. Mothers & Daughters
 - i. Planted & tended vegetable gardens
 - ii. Helped the harvest
 - iii. Occasionally cared for livestock
 - iv. Cooked & made clothes for the family
 - m. Used crops to barter for services
 - n. Dealt with rural artisans & merchants
4. People of the Pine Barrens
- a. One of the most controversial groups
 - b. Independent whites
 - c. 10 % of southern whites
 - d. Not slaveholders, landowners, nor primarily farmers
 - e. Lived in crude cabins on cleared few acres on which they squatted
 - f. Planted corn between trees & raised hogs
 - g. Simple diet of cornmeal & pork, supplemented by fish
 - h. Did not raise cash crops
 - i. Appeared lazy & shiftless
 - j. Northerners cited them as proof that slavery degraded non-slaveholding whites
 - k. Counter: unlike poor in the North, these people could fend for themselves
 - l. Had Southern Pride:
 - i. Men reluctant to hire themselves out as farm laborers
 - ii. When they did they refused to do “slave” work
 - iii. Women would sew on hire, but refused to be servants
 - m. Many live in pine barrens out of choice

Other Southern Occupations Included:

- 1. lawyers
- 2. physicians
- 3. merchants
- 4. artisans
- 5. each dealt with & therefore identified with one of the above groups