INSIDE THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

Contemporary views on slavery and the Southern economy

Master's Thesis

North American Studies

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Introduction

By the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was firmly entrenched throughout the southern states, from the Chesapeake to the Texan borderlands.[1] Indeed, a South without slavery was by then virtually unthinkable to antebellum southerners. Slavery and slave-based agriculture was the source of virtually all wealth in the southern states, and cotton had become the nation's most important export commodity. "As slavery became the South's defining feature, both culturally and economically," as Brian Gabriel has argued, "it became, in the view of many—convinced as most southerners were by their elite slave-owning brethren—something worth preserving at all costs, even the Union's destruction."[2]

Despite the unfathomable wealth that it generated for slaveholders, however, many non-southerners viewed the necessity and efficiency of slavery differently, and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the impact of the "peculiar institution" on the nation's economy increasingly became the subject of intense scrutiny and debate by prominent thinkers and politicians as well as ordinary citizens. Slavery was *the* central issue for Americans during the antebellum period. "Even at its height in the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans debated slavery," Mark Smith has argued. "Was it a profitable, progressive, and healthy institution? If so, for whom? For slaveholders in particular? For non-slaveowners? For slaves? For the southern economy generally?"[3]

After the 1830s in particular, with the advent of a vocal and prolific abolitionist movement that bridged the northern US and Great Britain, the intensity of these debates increasingly polarized Americans. Smith points out a decisive break with the past took place

[1] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011) "Deep South."
[2] Brian Gabriel, *The Press and Slavery in America, 1791-1859 : The Melancholy Effect of Popular Excitement* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 124.
[3] Mark M. Smith and Economic History Society, *Debating Slavery : Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South* (New Studies in Economic and Social History, 1998), 1.

after the Denmark Vesey Slave Uprising of 1822 and the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831.[4] It became harder for advocates of slavery after these incidents to sell the idea that bondsmen were content with their dreadful lives on plantations. "More damaging still was the growing criticism among northern wage labor advocates, who contended that, regardless of its immorality, slavery was an archaic, inefficient institution, inferior to northern free wage labor", Smith underscores.[5]

Especially powerful in the antebellum slavery debates were the published travel writings of northerners and Brits who visited the South and witnessed slavery with their own eyes. Unlike abolitionists who lived far removed from slavery and were disregarded by southerners as ignorant to the institution, eyewitness accounts of slavery by critical northerners and British visitors were received by the general public in the North and Great-Britain with an air of authority that embarrassed and infuriated slavery's apologists. Travel writers such as Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) tended not to depict the southern plantation economy in a favorable light, whatever the export statistics were, a trend that baffled and infuriated the planter class, who countered with arguments about the efficiency of bondage and its major contribution to the gross domestic product of the young republic. With the exception of a few short periods of economic downturn, the late antebellum plantation economy had proved itself to be immensely profitable, southern apologists claimed, especially after it had expanded into the Black Belt in the Deep South. At a time when business was booming, planters and land speculators felt their economic position tremendously threatened by the sudden wave of criticism coming from the North and Britain. They feared that negative public opinion could impact federal economic policy or, even worse, the institution of slavery itself. With a huge economic incentive to steer public opinion away from every negative assertion regarding slavery, southern writers and

[4] Smith, 8-9.
[5] Ibid.

thinkers combated northern and British criticism of their economy with a flurry of publications that underscored how efficient, healthy, and progressive their society was. The tone and content of the debate on slavery after 1830 therefore increasingly centered around polar opposite views of the role of slavery in economic development in the southern states, and, by extension, the United States.

This thesis examines the public discourse concerning the efficiency, profitability and progressiveness of the plantation economy by researching influential publications of eyewitnesses of southern slavery, both the critical travel writings of northern and British visitors to the South as well as the apologetic rebuttals of prominent southern slaveholders. Writers on both sides of this debate witnessed the plantation economy and therefore describe the same institution, but interestingly draw contrasting conclusions of its economic efficiency. The overarching question that this thesis addresses is: How did both southern and non-southern eyewitness accounts of slavery depict the economic efficiency of the institution in the antebellum period? To get a better understanding of what drove North and South apart during the late antebellum, this thesis examines some of the most influential published works of six witnesses of the antebellum southern plantation economy: three southern proslavery advocates and three visitors from outside the South who were critical of slavery as an economic model.

This thesis aims to fill a gap in the historiography by addressing how southerners and non-southerners thought about the efficiency of slavery, rather than how the plantation economy actually performed. Most modern scholarship on the southern economy has sought to uncover to what extent the South's economy was managed by a rational and capitalistic minded planter class, and tends to focus mainly on the actual efficiency of plantations and labor relations of the antebellum South.

Walter Johnson, in his celebrated *River of Dark Dreams* (2013), for example, focusses

on the global market of cotton, the flow of capital and the economic importance of the domestic slave trade in the nineteenth century. He argues that the institution of slavery, governed by a powerful planter class, was capitalistic in every sense. He emphasizes that "an institution that had been in decline throughout the eighteenth century in the Upper South was revivified in the Lower South at terrible cost; by 1860, there were more millionaires per capita in the Mississippi Valley than anywhere else in the United States. White privilege on an unprecedented scale was wrung from the lands of the Choctaw, the Creek, and the Chickasaw and from the bodies of the enslaved people brought in to replace them."[6]

In 2014, Edward Baptist, the author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, underscores the cruel, money driven motives of the planter class. In the introduction he writes "… the massive and cruel engineering required to rip a million people from their homes, brutally drive them to new, disease-ridden ridden places and make them live in terror and hunger as they continually built and rebuilt a commodity generating empire."[7] Profit was the main motive for planters to keep investing in slaves and fertile lands. Baptist furthermore argues that slavery was not merely a pre-modern institution only profitable for the South, but that the capitalistic system also financed economic development and diversification in the free states. ".. the same work of hands that built a wealthy South enabled the free states to create the world's second industrial revolution.", Baptist points out

John J. Clegg in *Capitalism and Slavery*, highlights the economic boom that took place during the late antebellum. He contends that all books published after 2012 recognize that "slavery was central to nineteenth-century capitalism and that it enabled the

[6] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams : Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 5.
[7] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told : Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014), XIX.

industrialization of Britain and the United States."[8]. Clegg interestingly adheres that modern scholars "don't argue that slave owners were always rational and calculating; indeed, Johnson and Baptist stress other motives such as sadism and irrational speculation. Rather, the claim is that slave owners were fundamentally out to make money and often applied modern innovations and management techniques to this end."[9]

His 2015, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860,* the author, Calvin Schermerhorn, eloquently describes the attitude of the planter class during the antebellum era. He writes, "as slave-reliant commercial agriculture grew in the southern reaches of the U.S. republic, river valleys such as the Mississippi became a distinctive landscape of proslavery expansionists jealous of their political rights and fiercely protective of their economic prerogatives over African-descended bondspersons."[10]This is what really motivated the planter class to argue the plantation economy was efficient.

Modern scholarship is very clear about the motives of the planter class to defend slavery against attacks from anyone. Planters were no irrational stragglers left behind in a changing world. The plantation economy, they knew, was to its core capitalistic and in its very essence a system that exploited millions of people. This is all clear in retrospect, but what has been less well studied are eyewitness accounts of antebellum travelers and planters that evaluated the performance of slavery at the time. These eyewitnesses of the South's Peculiar Institution drew remarkably contrasting conclusions from the same phenomenon and that is exactly why they have been selected. The travelers and planters selected for this thesis could not disagree more about the slavery. Understanding how both critics and apologists of slavery thought about the economic efficiency of the institution can help scholars better understand how prominent thinkers and writers of the nineteenth century defined and viewed

[8] John J. Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," *Critical Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015): 281.
[9] Ibid., 282.
[10] Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 3.

a modern and progressive economy, and the role of labor coercion in that emerging economic model. Visitors from outside the South, as mentioned earlier, saw slavery as anything but modern and progressive. Certainly, not every traveler was an abolitionist, but many publications contradict most of the planters' claims about slavery. The visitors selected for this thesis emphasized the plantation economy's inefficiency compared to free farms, impoverished living conditions of most white Southerners and the detrimental state of the southern economy and infrastructure. John David Cox in *Traveling South,* affirms that many foreigners and travelers from the Northern states to the South indeed, "represented the region as backward, wild, uncivilized, or dangerous."[11]

Critical eyewitness accounts of the antebellum slave economy, written by outsiders are scarce and none are as detailed the ones selected for this thesis. The two foreigners and Northerner examined were undoubtedly biased towards favoring their own societies ,without slavery. Eyewitness accounts are by definition biased, but are a reliable source when researching how non-southerners depicted the efficiency of slavery. Indeed, northern critique of the South was not always accurate, but "was closer to the mark than is generally recognized," John Ashworth points out.[12]

The first eyewitness account of the plantation economy's performance examined in this thesis was written by British social theorist and author Harriet Martineau (1802-1876). In her book *Retrospect of Western Travel*, she writes a great deal about her journey through the US and her experiences in relation to slavery and the condition of the Southern economy. Besides being an observer of the antebellum South and the economy, Martineau actually debated slavery with southerners. Her active approach towards the matter places her at the center of the contemporary debates on slavery. Martineau, during her career, produced 35

[11] John D. Cox, *Traveling South* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 2.
[12] John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic. Vol. 1: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81.

books and was "well respected, earning her living by the pen," Diana Postlethwaite writes.[13]

Like many other European intellectuals in the first half of the nineteenth century, Martineau was interested in the democratic experiment taking place in the young republic oversees. By publishing her memoirs in a book, she endeavored to educate the British public about female issues, politics, religion, the economy and social institutions in the US. *Retrospect of Western Travel* was also published in the US. Jamie L. Bronstein writes, "her book also includes short but bitingly honest sketches of many of the leaders of Jacksonian politics -- Jackson, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, among others. Her willingness to describe their appearances and modes of speaking, their vices and their achievements, originally elicited some bad reviews for the book in the American press, but it makes the book a wonderful resource for students of the period."[14] Few contemporary sources concerning the slave economy are as detailed as *Retrospect of Western Travel*. The book introduced a large British and American public to the many horrors of slave based labor and lack of efficiency of the plantation economy.

The second travel writer examined in this paper is James Shaw. *Twelve years in America: being observations on the country, the people, institutions and religion; with notices of slavery and the late war; and facts and incidents illustrative of ministerial life and labor in Illinois, with notes of travel through the United States and Canada*, written by the Methodist clergyman from Dublin and published just after the Civil War is a first person account of the daily life, institutions, and economy of US. His firsthand experiences of slavery and basic mathematical approach regarding land values and labor efficiency make him a prominent contributor to the debate concerning the slave economy during the late antebellum. Shaw

[13] Diana, Postlethwaite, "Mothering and Mesmerism in the Life of Harriet Martineau," *Signs* 14, no. 3 (1989): 583.
[14] Jamie L. Bronstein, review of *Retrospect of Western Travel*, by Harriet Martineau, H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews, (January, 2001), http://www.h-net.org/reviews.showrevs.php?id=4861. Accessed July 6, 2020.

repeatedly underscored the total absence of economic development of the region.[15] Published in Ireland and Britain, *Twelve Years in America* is a detailed book of life in Canada and the US, where "he has recorded his honest sentiments."[16] His comprehensive eyewitness account of the plantation economies' performance contributes to filling the gap in the historiography about how non-southerners thought about the efficiency of slavery.

The third critical eyewitness of slavery examined in this thesis is landscape architect and Journalist Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903). Olmsted was fascinated by the slave economy and in 1852 decided, with financial backing from the *New-York Daily Times*, to travel to the South. Olmsted's accounts of the plantation economy are by far the most detailed of the three travelers selected for this thesis. His goal was, amongst other things, to honestly inform northerners reading his newspaper about the real efficiency of slavery and inner workings of the plantation economy.

Olmsted in 1856 published *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* and a year later, after five years of traveling, returned home to Connecticut. Two other books of his journey followed the coming years. The response to Olmsted's publications in the US was mixed. Many readers in the North agreed with him that the slave based economy was antiquated, backward and inefficient. Others, including some northerners, certainly did not. Remembering a conversation with a banker, Olmsted wrote that the man refused to believe the South's economy was as undeveloped as he had argued, because the crops were worth hundreds of millions every year. In response Olmsted wrote, "my own observation of the real condition of the people of our Slave States, gave me on the contrary an impression that the cotton monopoly in some way did them more harm than good; and although the written narration of what I saw was not intended to set this forth, upon reviewing it for the present publication, I

[15] James Active Shaw, *Twelve years in America: being observations on the country, the people, institutions and religion; with notices of slavery and the late war; and facts and incidents illustrative of ministerial life and labor in Illinois, with notes of travel through the United States and Canada* (1867), 60.
[16] Shaw, V.

find the impression has become a conviction," he wrote in *Journeys and Explorations in the Cotton Kingdom*.[17] Olmsted, mainly wrote for a northern audience when he still worked for the *New York Daily Times* and the books that followed them were also published in the North.

On the other side of the debate were proslavery apologists fighting for the preservation of slavery. With profit as the guiding principle, rational planters were highly motivated participants in debates to defend their slave empires against attacks. With great vigor, in published essays, books and speeches, planters defended the enslavement of millions of black people. They all argued that slavery was essential for a well-functioning American economy. Also, many advocates of slavery were members of the southern elite and often had a substantial amount of political influence or even were politicians themselves. That meant that the slave based economic powerhouse could always rely on a substantial amount of federal political support in Washington.

In the second chapter of this thesis, to highlight the other side of the contemporary debate regarding the efficiency of slavery, publications of three prominent advocates of the institution are examined. John Calhoun (1782-1850), Edmund Ruffin (1794-1865) and James Henry Hammond's (1807-1864) overarching objective was to convince Americans of slavery's necessity for the entire economy. "Economists warned America that the national prosperity was built on slavery, and that emancipation would surely be followed by economic ruin, complete and permanent," Albert Deutsch writes.[18] Most Northerners remained unconvinced of this message, therefore proslavery documents, like the ones examined in this theses, were mainly published for Southerners. Calhoun representing South-Carolina, in a speech in the senate in 1837 said, "I feel myself called upon to speak freely upon the subject

[17] Frederick Law Olmsted, *Journeys and explorations in the Cotton Kingdom* (Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), 8.
[18] Albert Deutsch, "The First U. S. Census of the Insane (1840) and Its Use As Pro-Slavery Propaganda," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 15 (1944): 469.

where the honor and interests of those I represent are involved."[19] Ruffin when referring to slavery often called it the Southern way of life and during the decade preceding the American Civil War encouraged every southerner to take up arms against the Union. Hammond's focus was not every southerner. He mainly focused on politicians and lobbyists. By arguing that in a society, the lower classes, in this case slaves, were ethnically inclined to work simple jobs, he tried to convince his fellow members of the Democratic Party in the South that slavery was the way forward. Instead of turning away from the lucrative, but fragile plantation economy he worked effortlessly to keep the planter class and southern politicians focused on slavery. By arguing the South's economy had never been as healthy and efficient, in articles and books, predominantly meant for a Southern audience, Calhoun, Ruffin and Hammond underscored its efficiency and modernity.

Because of the amount of publications and because of their frequent public appearances, Calhoun, Ruffin and Hammond were central figures in the public discourse over slavery efficiency. Their published works were pro slavery propaganda in every sense of the word. Slavery was not merely a necessary evil, they underscored it was a positive good. Not a single critical note regarding slavery's efficiency or downsides of the plantation economy can be found in the decades they defended the institution that defined the antebellum South.

For many the downsides of slavery were obvious. Calhoun, Ruffin and Hammond however maintained that every single aspect of the of human bondage was vastly superior to that of the North and highly exaggerated the positive economic effects of forced labor for the economy. Modern scholars point out that planters were fully aware of the vulnerability of the export based economy and terrible living conditions of bondsmen. Evidently the gentlemen preferred to be silent about obsolete infrastructure, severe land depletion, the socioeconomic

[19] John C. Calhoun, *Speeches of Mr. Calhoun of S. Carolina, on the Bill for the Admission of Michigan Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January, 1837* (Washington, D.C.: Printed by Duff Green, 1837), 6.

position of poor white Southerners and almost total absence of economic diversification.

The first prominent advocate of slavery examined in this thesis is John Calhoun. As a member of the slave holding South Carolinian aristocracy, he in his publications, became famous in the public discourse for describing slavery as a "positive good." The career politician held the office of Secretary of War, Vice-President and Secretary of State and was between 1843 and 1850, with a short interval, the Senator from South-Carolina.

The second proslavery advocate examined is Edmund Ruffin, a Virginian planter and renowned contemporary soil scientist. During his lifetime, Ruffin had massively invested in slavery and owned several plantations in his home state. As becomes clear from articles and books he published, he was a fierce advocate of slavery and the plantation economy. Out of the three men examined, Ruffin was by far the most militant defender of slavery and one of the first to argue in favor of secession of the Confederacy from the Union. Apart from the many publications aimed at southerners, Ruffin was constantly traveling to urban centers in an effort to convince audiences of slavery's southern secession for the Union.

The third planter and politician examined in this thesis is James Henry Hammond. Hammond owned hundreds of slaves and trough marriage and inheritance became the proprietor of 22 square miles of farmland.[20] For a short period he was a Member of the House of Representatives, the 60th Governor of South Carolina and later the Senator from South Carolina. Hammond, in his famous 1858 "Mudsill Speech" argued that slavery was the very foundation of southern society and its, according to him, healthy economy. Amongst many other pro slavery statements regarding the economy and labor relations, he also, in various published works, pointed out that slaves received decent compensation for their work and were better off than free workers.

The public contemporary debate about the efficiency of slavery and the economic

[20] Rosellen Brown, "Monster of All He Surveyed," *New York Times*, January 29, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/29/books/monster-of-all-he-surveyed.html.

development of the South will be examined in the two chapters and is followed by a conclusion. The first chapter examines publications of three visitors from outside the South. The second chapter examines publications of three southern advocates of slavery.

Chapter 1. Views of Visitors

"It was necessary that I should travel in Virginia to have any idea of a slave state. An exhausted soil, old decaying towns, wretchedly-neglected roads, and, in every respect, an absence of enterprise and improvement, distinguish the region through which we have come, in contrast to that in which we live. Such has been the effect of slavery", senator Henry Wilson from Massachusetts said in 1858.[21] Around the same time Olmsted wrote, "I almost think a majority, of the eastern Virginians live but one step removed from what we should deem great destitution in the North."[22] By all means the antebellum South was, according to visitors, a backward and underdeveloped region of the US.

Why the antebellum South failed to industrialize and kept its one-sided and inefficient economy at this time in history was a topic of scholarly debate for nineteenth-century observers and still remains so in the twenty-first century. Susanna Delfino, and Michele Gillespie in *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization from the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age*, argue the South did industrialize but that only "a few historians recognized the cultural blinders that had prevented them from seeking out innovations and new technologies in other places and regions, and the American South in particular."[23] The region's climate and fertile soil destined the South to be an agricultural success, which it to some extent was.

The depression of 1819-1820 resulted in a decline in crop prices, industrial unemployment in the North and with it strong support for protective measures from the

[21] Henry Wilson, "Are Working Men Slaves?," (Speech of Hon. Henry Wilson, of Massachusetts, March 20, 1858).
[22] Frederick Law Olmsted, *The cotton kingdom : a traveller's observations on cotton and slavery in the American slave states : based upon three former volumes of journeys and investigations by the same author* (New York: Knopf, 1953), 138.
[23] Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization from the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 2.

federal government, George Rogers Taylor writes.[24] The North's "infant" manufacturing industry was unable to compete with Britain, which led to the decision by Congress to heavily tax imported products. The North's agricultural sector of the economy was also unable to compete with its Southern counterpart in terms of export value, so taxes on raw products, like cotton and tobacco, were also raised, Paul Abrahams points out.[25] Both measures were extremely disadvantageous for the South and resulted in an economic downturn, Ashworth adheres.[26]

The official story Congress sold to the press was that in an effort to protect the country's economy, they had to implement certain taxes. The later 1828 Tariff, better known as the "Tariff of Abominations", further angered Southern politicians and planters. They correctly suspected that the North not only wanted to protect itself, but also wanted to control the rivaling economy in the South. In the following decade, friction between the free North and the Slave South only increased and from the 1830s onwards tensions between the North and the South had grown to such an extent that some Southern politicians openly spoke about secession from the Union at various times in the antebellum period.[27]

As Parker points out, "The South was the great supplier of cotton to the industrial economies of northwestern Europe and the northeastern United States".[28] Its one-sided economy was primarily export-based and whatever the South did not produce itself had to be imported. What followed from the political turmoil in the aftermath of the Tariffs was the

[24] George Rogers Taylor, *The Great Tariff Debate 1820-1830* (Boston: Heath, 1953), 2.
[25] Paul P. Abrahams, "Tariffs," In *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, Oxford University Press, 2001, accessed July 22, 2020, https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/view/10.1093/acref/9780195082098.001.0001/acref-9780195082098-e-1505.
[26] John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic. Vol. 2: The Coming of the Civil War, 1850-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.
[27]Gordon S. Wood, "The Revolutionary Origins of the Civil War," Northwestern University Law Review 114, no. 2 (March 2019): 540, http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=139470599&site=ehost-live.
[28] William N. Parker and Agricultural History Society, *The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South* (Washington, D.C.: Agricultural History Society, 1970), 1.

Nullification Crisis between 1832 and 1833. South Carolinian Vice president until December 28, 1832, John Calhoun objected to the tariffs by claiming they were unconstitutional. In a letter to James Henry Hammond he argued that the states' rights doctrine needed to be "manfully supported" by Southern politicians.[29] Calhoun had some success when eventually the tariffs were lowered, Abrahams writes.[30]

Visitors to the slave states, during the three decades before the Civil War were constantly aware of the South's willingness to defend itself against anyone threatening slavery and tax rises. "I am confident that, whatever might be the reason, the general mind was full of anxiety at the time of my visit", Martineau wrote.[31] She added that these influences "educating" the young of Charleston were "Inducing a reliance on the physical rather than moral force, and strengthening attachment to feudal notions of honour and of every kind of good; notions that have no affinity with true republican morals".[32]

Harriet Martineau

When traveling through South Carolina, Martineau wrote that she found herself right in the middle of growing hostilities between the regions. She witnessed and partook in debates between advocates and opponents of the role slavery played in the economy of the South.[33] Southern gentlemen rightly suspected, as became clear after the Civil War, that without total control of the working population, profits from money crops and what was left of the economy and therewith southern society, would collapse. Thomas Brown agrees and points out "a general remodeling of everything" was necessary after the Civil War.[34]

[29] John Calhoun to James H. Hammond, May 16, 1831, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun. Vol. 11* 1829-1832*, ed. Clyde N. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1978), 382.
[30] Paul P. Abrahams, "Tariffs,"
[31] Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel Vol.1.*(London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 240.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 226-227.
[34] Thomas J. Brown, *Reconstructions New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

A stranger to the South, Martineau was born in Norwich, England, in a wealthy middle-class family. Before traveling to the US, she and her brother had attempted to influence British politics with series of drawings. In a book called *Illustrations of Political Economy*, published is 1832, they pioneered a top-down approach to address new social problems, such as the poor working and living conditions of laborers in rapidly growing and immensely overpopulated cities. Also, as an early sympathizer of abolitionism, she wrote and drew abolitionist pamphlets and publically spoke out against the cruelties of slavery, beginning in the early 1830s. It was pointed out by Northerners that her attitude towards slavery would potentially endanger her journey through the South but concluded with a travel companion "that there was no cause for fear.[35]

Martineau's activities were part of a new approach by abolitionists in an effort to shame the South into ending slavery. Fogel and Engerman write that after 1830, "much of the abolitionist literature was aimed at documenting the abuses which arose from the arbitrary authority exercised by slaveholders."[36] Furthermore, they write that beginning in the late 1820s, critics of slavery took up the argument that slavery had hurt rather than profited the economy of the South.[37] Still in England, Martineau at first only disapproved of slavery on a moral basis. Later when she saw with her own eyes what disastrous an impact slavery had on the South's economy, she agreed with critics that slavery had indeed harmed the economy. In short, her memoirs are a combination of moral disapproval of slavery together with observations about the antebellum South's profound lack of economic development and prosperity.

In contrast with Britain, where everyone knew their place due to a complex system of inherited ranks and classes, the US was strictly divided on the basis of skin color. Bondsmen

[35] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel Vol.1*, 208-209.
[36] Robert William Fogel, and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross : The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (London : London: Little, Brown and Comp.; Wildwood House, 1974), 159.
[37] Ibid.

were always Africans or descendants from Africans. Martineau was not used to a society completely divided along racial lines, hence black slaves made a deep impression on her from the moment she saw one. The first time she saw a slave from the windows of her carriage, she wrote that she "speculated on the lot of every person of colour for days."[38] During her visit to the upper South, she admitted she was somewhat oblivious to the fact that almost every black person was a slave. This was pointed out by a woman from New England in a hotel in Baltimore. The unnamed woman told her that every interaction with a black person Martineau had had that day was with a slave. She was most surprised by the fact that even the well dressed and mannered black and mulatto hotel staff were slaves.[39] The fact that the mulatto hotel staff had close interactions with white guests cannot be a coincidence. Robert Toplin Brent asserts that "For many years Americans from both the North and the South openly expressed a marked bias favoring the mulatto over the negro".[40]

Traveling to the Deep South, Martineau wrote about the various ways slavery had shaped the landscape over the last 200 years. Apart from the large amount of black people, the countryside and climate differed from both the North and England in many aspects. There were only a few small cities and none of them were as vibrant as their equivalent in free societies. Real urban centers with a population exceeding 100,000 did not exist, with Baltimore and New Orleans being the only exceptions. The strong focus on agriculture meant that all the land in the South was used as farmland. Real industrial centers, like Liverpool, Manchester, London or New York, failed to develop. Andrew Slap however argues that the significance of urban areas for the South's economy cannot be underestimated, because they were important centers for slavery and the slave trade.[41] Slap maintains that urban centers

[38] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western travel Vol 1*.,140.
[39] Ibid., 141-142.
[40] Robert Brent Toplin, "Between Black and White: Attitudes Toward Southern Mulattoes, 1830-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 45, no. 2 (1979): 185.
[41] Andrew L. Slap, Frank Towers and David R. Goldfield, *Confederate Cities : The Urban South during the Civil War Era* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 31-32.

performed only a fraction of that of the cities in the North, because of the staple crop economy.

The South differed in another aspect from free societies. The infrastructure that connected populated areas was of very poor quality. Trains and railroads were a recent invention, so a substantial amount of human and transport still took place via waterways. In the slave South the incentive to build and maintain overland tracks moreover was systematically put on the back burner, because the cheapest way to transport money crops was via rivers and canals. Martineau complained about the exact, but more importantly, the relative distances in the antebellum South. It took passengers an unnecessarily long time to travel from one place to another. Nineteenth-century travelers, like Martineau and Olmsted, were used to carriage travel and the slow passing days aboard sailing ships. Nonetheless all of them concluded that traveling through the South was very unpleasant and exceptionally slow paced. Olmsted some twenty years later than Martineau wrote, "A slave country can never, it is evident, furnish a passenger traffic of much value."[42] Their claim about the South's roads, bridges and railways is supported by Aaron Mars, who points out that "Slave owners did not generally invest their capital into the industry or infrastructure."[43] Roads as a result were often uneven and, depending on the soil, at times too muddy for any transport to take place. "The disasters of our railroad journey have been described elsewhere", is Martineau's first sentence of the chapter "City Life in the South".[44] Even in urban centers such as Charleston, the oldest city of South Carolina, there were few pavements. More than 160 years after it was founded, Martineau wrote that the slightest drop of rain turned the fine sand into "a most deceptive mud".[45]

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[42] Frederick Law Olmsted and William P. Trent, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: With Remarks on Their Economy*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge Library Collection - North American History, 2009), 22.
[43] Aaron W. Marrs, "The Iron Horse Turns South: A History of Antebellum Southern Railroads," *Enterprise & Society* 8, no. 4 (2007): 784, https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/231310.
[44] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel Vol.1,* 223.
[45] Ibid., 224.

To illustrate the infrastructural abomination of Charleston, Martineau stated that she was astonished to hear that in the previous year a horse had drowned in a mud hole in the middle of the street. She complained that the hotel she stayed in was dark and comfortless and that at night there was no lighting in the streets at all.[46] When even an old and relatively densely populated city was lacking proper roads, drainage and hotels, Martineau reasoned that the rural South was even worse.

Facilities for travelers in the countryside were indeed even worse than in urban areas. Because it was almost impossible to sleep in the carriages driving on the poor, bumpy roads, travelers like Martineau complained about severe sleep deprivation, fatigue and, strangely, also a lack of food. Passengers were also invariably subjected to irregular and unusual timetables. Sometimes a carriage or boat had to leave in the middle of the night, so that passengers would be in time to make a transfer only a few miles away. Reliable public transport was nonexistent in the antebellum south of the 1830's.[47]

When Martineau wasn't advancing through the South, she mostly stayed at plantations and occasionally in hotels. On plantations it was customary for the lady of the house to guide visitors around the plantation or several plantations her husband owned. Martineau didn't care much for these business empires dominated by Southern gentlemen. She was interested in the slaves' working and living conditions. On the plantations she visited and along the side of the road, she mentions that all the slaves' clothes were dirty and that their quarters damp and dark. It was clear for Martineau that these people were dehumanized by their owners. When a carriage broke down, which it often did, slaves were "roused from the floor, where they were laying like dogs, go winking about, putting fresh logs on the smoldering fire, and lighting a lamp or two.", Martineau emphasized.[48]

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 211-213.
[48] Ibid., 213.

Although an immediate invasion seemed unlikely to her, around the time she stayed in South Carolina, John Calhoun had returned to his home town Charleston. Martineau was very surprised to hear that the senator had ordered the "warlike apparatus" to be readied, in case South Carolina had to fight against an invading army of the Union.[49] She wrote, "it is difficult to believe that Mr. Calhoun seriously meant to go to war with such means as his impoverished state could furnish; but there is no doubt he intended it."[50] Martineau in essence stated that it was obvious to her that if there was an armed conflict, South Carolina was too poor, underdeveloped, and unprepared to defend itself. Calhoun and other Southern politicians, arrogantly overestimated their chances of winning against an army of the Union. Outsiders like Martineau more than once pointed out the connection between the South's poor economic development and modest military capacity.

One of the reasons the military was ill-prepared for war, was low taxes. Martineau wrote about being present at a fundraiser for the military. Apparently, the military was partially funded by private citizens and some of the ladies paid with diamonds, she wrote.[51] Historians have researched antebellum tax revenues and found that in South Carolina, before 1850, the legislature never raised more than $307,000 through taxes. A large percentage, just over 60 percent, came from a head tax on slaves. Taking into account the value of the US dollar before the 1850s, only $200,000 dollars in tax revenue from around 400,000 slaves is still a disproportionally small amount of money, even for nineteenth-century standards. Additionally, half of the total population only paid a meagre 30 cents of tax per $100, Lacy K. Ford points out.[52]

In the second volume of her book, when she traveled back to the geographical North

[49] Ibid., 230.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism : The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 310.

via the Mississippi River, Martineau wrote about the system in which states were admitted to the Union. After the Missouri Compromise of 1820 she argued slaveholders could no longer claim slavery was a system they inherited from the past.[53] New states after 1820, the year a deliberate vote in Congress was passed, could choose to allow or forbid slavery in their constitution, as long as the balance between free and slave states was maintained. Martineau pointed out, by comparing free state Illinois, admitted to the Union in 1818 and slave state Missouri, admitted to the Union in 1820, that slavery was not always the better choice. Besides social differences between the states, that "showed from the very beginning", such as "hatred of negroes", she wrote, "rapacious adventures, who know that the utmost profit of slaves is made by working them hard on a virgin soil, began flocking to Missouri, while settlers who preferred smaller gains to holding slaves sat down in Illinois. When it was found, as soon as it was that slavery does not answer so well in the farming parts of Missouri as on the new plantations in the South, a farther difference took place." The difference that took place was that "the fine lands of Missouri", as Martineau called them, were less worth having than those of Illinois, because the latter did not have the curse of slavery upon them.[54] It meant that many new settlers first looked at cheaper land in Missouri, but then decided to go back over the Mississippi River to settle in rival state Illinois. Just before leaving Missouri she summarized her experience of the young slave state. She pointed out that the general expectation is that slavery would be abolished itself, "as it is found to be unprofitable and perilous, and a serious drawback to the prosperity of the region.

Martineau was convinced that slavery and the way southern society was organized sucked out the economic development of a region that showed signs of wealth and wisdom. She very much enjoyed the South's hospitality, its big extravagant houses with round-the-clock parties and the intellectual discussions she had with educated citizens. Everything else,

[53] Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western travel Vol. 2.* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 28.
[54] Ibid., 29.

however, lacked any form of delicacy and joy. She summarized her experience as follows. "For the stranger the South is restlessly gay or restlessly sorrowful. It is angry or exulting; it is hopeful or apprehensive. It is never content; never in such a state of calm satisfaction as to forget itself. This peculiarity poisons the satisfaction of the stranger in the midst of the free and joyous hospitality to which he would otherwise surrender himself with inconsiderable delight."[55]

James Shaw

Three decades after Martineau, Methodist clergyman James Shaw had come to a similar conclusion to Martineau's about the antebellum South. After a twelve-year journey through Canada and the US, he published his book in 1867. *Twelve Years In America Being Observations On The Country, The People, Institutions, And Religion; With Notices Of Slavery And The Late War and facts and incidents illustrative of ministerial life and labor in Illinois, with notes of travel through the United States and Canada*, is a collection of memoirs from the author. Two years after the American Civil War, Shaw painted a bright picture of the South's future. Very much focusing on population growth, the fertile land and finer climate. He pictured a region fit for emigration of millions of people and sustainment of a denser population than ever seen before.

The chapter where he is concerned with the South is best categorized as a tirade. The first four sentences are as follows. Shaw wrote; "the South and the southern states have never been developed. The four million slaves that toiled in the fields only raised cotton, sugar and tobacco. The eight million whites did nothing. There were no manufactures worth naming." [56] Robert Gallman agrees with Shaw and points out that cotton was the principal money crop for

[55] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel Vol. 1*, 238-239.
[56] Shaw, 60.

small and large farms.[57]

Shaw wrote that in 1790, the populations of both North and South were the same size. By 1860 the free states combined had double the population of the South.[58] "The slave States of the South possessed", he wrote, "an area nearly as large as the North, had a finer climate, richer soil, and older settlement; yet, in the race of progress, they came far behind those of the North."[59] Shaw does not mention that the North was able to grow much faster than the South because of immigration. Especially in the decades of the 1840s and 1850s, the North experienced "massive tides of immigration", J. Matthew Gallman contends.[60]

Shaw used statistics based on estimates to support his opinion of the antebellum South. By 1860, farmland in the North was worth three times more and was producing three times more than the same size of farmland in the South.[61] Additionally he wrote, "if the slaves raised in 1860, 5,000,000 bales of cotton, in 1870 they may raise more than double that, when paid for their labour."[62] Shaw furthermore underscored that slaves were less productive than free farmers, because the former lacked an incentive to work.[63]

The growth of income per capita in the South between 1840-1860, according to Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, implies efficiency on plantations was higher than previously assumed by scholars.[64] They believe there to be a connection between output and the slave-owners' unique system of reward and punishment and assert that slaves produced as much or more than regular farmers without slaves.[65] Their conclusion is counterintuitive and based on

[57] Robert Gallmann, "Self-Sufficiency in the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South," *Agricultural History* 44, no. 1 (1970): 6.
[58] Shaw, 61.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Andrew L. Slap, Frank Towers, and David R. Goldfield, *Confederate Cities : The Urban South during the Civil War Era* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press 2015), 31.
[61] Shaw, 61.
[62] Ibid., 62.
[63] Ibid., 68.
[64] Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, "Explaining the Relative Efficiency of Slave Agriculture in the Antebellum South: Reply," *American Economic Review* 70 (1980): 672.
[65] Robert William Fogel, Ralph A. Galantine and Scott N. Cardell, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery: Evidence and Methods* (New York: Norton, 1992), 321.

little but speculation as will become clear later on.

Profits were the prime motivator for planters to speculate in land and slaves. But trying to determine profitability of slavery on farms in the antebellum South depends very much on the variables scholars decide to research, James D. Faust and Dale E. Swan argue. Utilizing variations between geographic regions, soil types and different slaveholding classes, they estimated cotton output per slave between 1850 and 1860. They concluded that profitability in the South in that decade had increased, because rational slaveholding classes were focused on profits and left nothing to chance.[66]

Shaw adhered the slave states had lower land values, compared to the North. Also the output of farmland in the South dwindled compared to farms operated by free individuals. He wrote that most of the soil in the old South became depleted after the 1830s, essentially making it worthless. Peter Passel underscores that, "the rapid distribution of potential cotton lands at low prices complemented land-intensive cultivation methods. Westward movement in the cotton economy conspicuously left in its wake a residual of unproductive, exhausted lands unfit for farming."[67] Cotton is notoriously hard on the soil and needs a lot of water to grow, flushing away all nutrients, making it unfit for future use. Shaw complained the South had missed a great opportunity when it came to managing its resources, farmland being the main one. Shaw's observations are in line with the findings of modern scholarship. Land depletion is a natural process that can only be counteracted by trained and skilled farmers, which by definition, slaves were not. "Hence slaves worked well below their capabilities, and in turn making southern plantations unprofitable businesses", Smith points out.[68]

Bondsmen, in contrast with Engerman and Fogels' "unique system of punishment and

[66] James D. Foust and Dale E. Swan, "Productivity and Profitability of Antebellum Slave Labor: A Micro-Approach," *Agricultural History* 44, no. 1 (1970): 58, www.jstor.org/stable/3741360.
[67] Peter Passel, "The Impact of Cotton Land Distribution on the Antebellum Economy," *The Journal of Economic History* 31, no. 4 (1971): 917-37, www.jstor.org/stable/2117216.
[68] Smith, 62.

reward", were never content with their situation and the outnumbered planter class was constantly afraid of a slave rebellion. Slaves did not often call for an organized rebellion against their master; betrayal of conspiracies and effective repressive measures meant they were doomed to fail, Marion Kilson points out.[69] Also, the white population was armed to the teeth and aligned themselves with planters. Contradicting themselves, Fogel and Engerman write that slave resistance took the form of stealing, faking illness, and damaging the crops.[70] Resistance, in any form, must have reduced the output of slaves' work. Resistance to labor was a much bigger for problem planters than Fogel and Engerman acknowledge.

Eugene Genovese emphasizes there is an additional contributor to the slaves' lower productivity, compared to wage workers, which was food. Planters solely produced for profit and saved as much as they could on food for slaves. The low energy levels of slaves were a result of one-sided and low-quality diets, largely based on corn, molasses and pork. Genovese writes, "The land so assigned was generally the poorest available, and the quality of foodstuffs consequently suffered."[71] He rather unconvincingly adds that this wasn't the result of the masters' ignorance of cruelty. Planters were not irrational farmers and must have had some knowledge about the quality of the food their slaves ate.

Shaw argued that slavery had been parasitical to the South's economy and overall development. After the Civil War, "it was God's amputating knife to cut out the cancer that was destroying the life of the nation," he wrote.[72] Lawyer and author Daniel R. Hundley from Alabama, describing poor white men in 1860, wrote, "their wives and daughters spin and weave the wool or cotton into such description of cloth as is in most vogue for the time being;

[69] Marion D. DeB. Kilson, "Towards Freedom: An Analysis of Slave Revolts in the United States," *Phylon (1960-)* 25, no. 2 (1964): 187, Accessed June 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/273653.187.
[70] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 321.
[71] Smith, 62.
[72] Shaw, 62.

while the husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, betake themselves to their former idle habits - hunting, beef-shooting, gander-pulling, marble-playing, card-playing, and getting drunk."[73] Additionally Shaw pointed out that the near absence of universities and literary institutions had halted the South's development even more.

The Dubliner ended on a positive note. He predicted the South would become a highly developed region of the US after slavery's abolition. He wrote, "if the landed property and products of the South were equal to the North, the South and its products would be worth 5,859,246,616 dollars, equal to £1,172,000,000 more than it was, such was the difference slavery had made between North and South."[74]

After the war however, the South was unable to keep up with the North. Modern scholars have the benefit of hindsight, but Shaw was convinced of a brighter future. After the war, Shaw predicted the South would become a vast opening for millions of free people to develop and profit from. Especially the cotton states bordering on the Gulf of Mexico had "a soil of exuberant fertility and, a climate friendly to long life."[75] Adding that, "the removal of the monopoly of slave labour is a pledge that those regions will be peopled by a numerous and enterprising population, which will vie with any in the Union in compactness, incentive genius, wealth and industry."[76] Even if he was right about the South's potential, the damage 200 years of slavery had done was irreversible.

Frederick Law Olmsted

Olmsted, after years of debating Charles Brace -"a red hot abolitionist"- on the topic of slavery, the former decided to once and for all settle the argument and find out for himself.

[73] Daniel Robinson Hundly, *Social Relations in out Southern States* (Applewood Books Bedford Massachusetts, 1860), 262.
[74] Shaw, 63.
[75] Ibid., 64.
[76] Ibid., 64.

Brace introduced Olmsted to Henry J. Hammond, the editor of the New York Daily Times, and without further inquiry appointed Olmsted to be a special correspondent.[77]

Olmsted visited the South at a time of economic growth and prosperity. Cotton prices had revived after 1845 and slave prices surged after 1850. "Slaveholders were enjoying unexampled prosperity", Ashworth writes.[78] It seemed as if the South's economy was able to compete against some of the biggest industrializing societies of the time. However, the South kept investing in land and cotton. From it flowed little economic development and diversification. The South increasingly became dependent on the export of cotton and, to cap it all, after twenty years the question about slavery immediately returned when the huge accession of territory (covering California, Nevada, Utah, most of New-Mexico and Arizona, and parts of Oklahoma, Wyoming, Colorado, and Texas), as John Ashworth writes, "had acquired fresh urgency in the minds of many Southerners."[79] Congress eventually passed the Compromise of 1850, in a futile attempt to reduce hostilities between the North and the South. "It was concession or secession," a member of the 31st Congress said.[80]

In December 1852, Olmsted traveled southward from Washington DC, through Maryland into the state of Virginia. Years of economic prosperity had done nothing for most southerners, Olmsted immediately concluded. The difference between the North and South was striking. He compared the plantation houses to the large houses he was familiar with in the North, and concluded that the old plantation mansions "seem in sad need of repair."[81] Slaves lived in small wooden buildings around the main house. The rest of the South's white population lived in logged or loosely boarded houses and had "everything slovenly and dirty about them," he underscored.[82] The country he saw through the windows of trains and

[77] Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, XIV-XV.
[78] Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic Vol. 2*, 104.
[79] Ibid., 13.
[80] Ibid., 14.
[81] Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 31.
[82] Ibid., 31.

carriages, he maintained, "bore less signs of an active and prosperous people than any I have ever travelled through before, for an equal distance."[83]

Olmsted was occasionally more optimistic about the South. He was often impressed by the way the blacks and mulattos dressed and how properly they behaved compared to most of their masters. He wrote, "many of the coloured ladies were dressed not only expensively, but with good taste and effect, after the latest Parisian mode."[84] Slaves were allowed to spend money on expensive clothing. Conspicuous consumption, even for slaves, was not mentioned by Shaw and Martineau.

Olmsted still had a long way to go from Virginia. Before entering the Deep South however, he devoted an entire chapter to the economy of Virginia. Virginia was one of the oldest slave states of the US and was heavily dependent on the institution. Most slaves worked the land in Virginia and a surplus of slaves was sold or hired out on the slave market in the capitol, Richmond. Olmsted sometimes asked planters why no white laborers were hired if the demand for labor was that high. Planters refused to hire white laborers and the latter in turn refused to work jobs that were traditionally done by slaves. In this system all wealth was exchanged between planters. The rest of society did not reap the benefits of the cotton boom.

Rapid cotton planting in the Deep South fueled the demand for slaves. Like other "old" slave states, Virginia experienced an outflow of "negro laborers" to cotton plantations of the Deep South whose proprietors were prepared to pay good money for hard working slaves. Slave markets were busy places. "In the general slave market there was constant competition among those wishing to sell, and among those wishing to buy," Ulrich B. Philips wrote.[85]

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[83] Ibid., 32.
[84] Ibid., 37.
[85] Ulrich B. Philips, "The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," *Political Science Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1905): 261.

The slave market in Richmond became the center of the domestic slave trade during the two decades preceding the Civil War.[86] Jan Richard Heier writes "Richmond, Virginia, became a central slave market that facilitated the interstate slave trade as Old South planters chose the course of selling slaves as a valuable commodity rather than the course of manumission."[87]

Most people did not own valuable commodities in the form of slaves. Olmsted gives vivid descriptions of the poor infrastructure and derelict houses everywhere in the South. Some buildings were occupied but everything in the South that couldn't be postponed or overlooked without immediate attention was neglected, he underscored. The reasons therefore were an almost total absence of craftsmen and the high costs of maintenance. "What was missing from the southern market was the demand for manufactures for which the technology permitted production on a modest local scale, in small shops scattered across the countryside," William Parker points out.[88] Olmsted predicted that overdue maintenance of buildings and roads, as well as shortage of labor would only increase in the future.[89] Two decades after Martineau, he had come to the same conclusion as his predecessor. He eloquently summarized that people lived "such as one might expect to find in a country in stress of war."[90]

What Olmsted described is typical for a society led by people whose only focus was personal gain. How much slavery debilitated Southern society, follows from Olmsted's following comparison. He wrote about the salient differences in wealth between the several counties in Virginia he visited. The ratio of slaves to whites in a county, he underscored, had a remarkable effect on the development of the area. Olmsted wrote, "schools, churches, roads,

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[86] "Slavery in Virginia," http://edu.lva.virginia.gov/online_classroom/union_or_secession/unit/2/slavery_in_virginia, Accessed 29-08-2019.
[87] Jan Richard Heier, "Accounting for the Business of Suffering: A Study of the Antebellum Richmond, Virginia, Slave Trade," *Abacus* 46, no. 1 (2010): 60.
[88] Parker, William N. Parker and Agricultural History Society, *The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South* (Washington, D.C.: Agricultural History Society, 1970): 117.
[89] Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom,* 86.
[90] Ibid.

bridges, fences, houses, stables, are all more frequent, and in better repair, where the proportion of whites to slave is larger, than in the "negro counties," as some are popularly designated, from the preponderance of the slave population in them."[91] As Shaw has pointed out, Olmsted affirmed that the "denseness" of slavery had a strong effect on the value of farmland. Thousands of acres of depleted farmlands were abandoned by former proprietors and, according to Olmsted, were unrecognizable for anyone who would have seen the area ten years previously. Additionally, poor white farmers, because they were seldom hired by planters, were almost unable to contribute to the development of the cotton states as well. Olmsted wrote about white farmers, "they work little and that little badly, they earn little, they sell little, they buy little and have little – very little – of the common comforts and consolidation of civilized life."[92]

Besides the lack of economic development and low value of farmland in the cotton states, efficiency on plantations, for two reasons, lingered in comparison to free farms in the North. Bondsmen in the first place were often ill, or faked illness. Olmsted wrote that slaves' medical problems were a widespread inconvenience for slavers. For minor illnesses, bondsmen often neglected or refused to take medication. Olmsted emphasized that, "frequently the slaves neglect or refuse to use the remedies prescribed for their recovery."[93] Fake illnesses, or even self-inflicted wounds, often made slaves unfit for work on the plantation. In the second place, when deemed fit for work, slaves did everything in their power to work as slowly as possible, Olmsted maintained. Moreover, farm material used by slaves had to be mended or replaced constantly, which suggests it was of low quality or broken on purpose. Olmsted dedicated numerous pages to low output on plantations. The situation is best by summarized by what Olmsted wrote in the following paragraph.

[91] Ibid., 88.
[92] Ibid., 13.
[93] Ibid., 109.

> "I have not yet made the inquiry on any plantation where as many as twenty negroes are employed together, that I have not found one or more of the field-hands not at work, on account of some illness, strain, bruise, or wound, of which he or she was complaining; and in such cases the proprietor or overseer has, I think, never failed to express his suspicion that the invalid was really as well able to work as anyone else on the plantation. It is said to be nearly as difficult to form a satisfactory diagnoses of the negroes' disorders as it is of infants', because their imagination is so vivid, and because not the smallest reliance is to be place on their accounts of what they have felt or done. If a man is really ill, he fears lest he should be thought to be simulating, and therefore exaggerates all his pains, and locates them in whatever he supposes to be the most vital parts of his system."[94]

Olmsted left Virginia and traveled southward to the Carolinas and Georgia. His attacks on slavery intensified and he kept pointing out how extremely underdeveloped large parts of these states were. As the owner of a farm in New England, Olmsted was no stranger to farming techniques and had a lot of knowledge about different kinds of soil. When talking to a young planter who wrongly claimed the land was too rough for ploughing, Olmsted wrote, "The fact is, in certain parts of South Carolina, a plough is yet an almost unknown instrument of tillage."[95] He added that the soil in South Carolina was light enough for a plough. Remarkably, innovations of the Bronze Age had not yet reached South Carolina in the 1850s according to Olmsted.

Martineau, Shaw and Olmsted were convinced the institute of slavery was detrimental for the South's economic development. Most modern scholars agree, and in various ways underscore how underdeveloped the South was compared to free societies at the time. The

[94] Ibid., 92.
[95] Olmsted and Trent, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 23.

near complete dependence on export-based money crops sold by planters, combined with exceptionally low taxes left the South's infrastructure in a destitute condition. Years of careless cultivation followed by depletion had made farmland worthless. In turn, Olmsted among other things made a very strong case against slavery based on its efficiency compared to free labor. The South, run for and by planters, reacted to criticism and dug in its heels in what culminated in three decades of passionate ideological debate about slavery. A large group of pro-slavery antebellum intellectuals argued that slavery was the way forward. In the next chapter, three prominent Southerners have their say.

Chapter 2. Views of Planters of the Antebellum South

The effect slavery had on societies has been a topic of debate for centuries, but "a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to antislavery movements and ideologies," Faust points out.[96] Southern planters and intellectuals completely disagreed - and needed to - with the anti-slave ideology of foreigners and Northerners. People with direct ties to slavery argued it was essential for the South's economy and society's institutions. Peter Kolchin points out that, "the antebellum South was a slave society, not merely a society in which some people were slaves, few areas of life there escaped the touch of the peculiar institution."[97] Slavery was the very foundation on which southern society was built.

Other than proslavery ideology, in recent years scholars like Walter Johnson, Calvin Schermerhorn and Edward Baptist have emphasized the capitalistic motives of planters and slave dealers. Robert, L. Ransom writes: "the need for close supervision to maintain productivity, the callous attitude toward the preferences of slaves in the determination of their working conditions, and the willingness to break up families if necessary, when selling slaves in response to economic factors are all attributes of the profit-seeking owner."[98] Profits motivated owners to support proslavery ideology.

Southern planters went as far as proclaiming slavery to be superior to free labor. They argued "King Cotton" was the driving force behind economic growth not only for the South, but for the rest of the United States as well, Ransom points out."[99] Their positive attitude towards slavery and the market value of slaves was further reinforced because profits from

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[96] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 1.
[97] Peter Kolchin and Eric. Foner, *American Slavery, 1619-1877*. American Century Series 851492711. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 169.
[98] Roger L Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 47.
[99] Ibid., 47-48.

cotton and other money crops increased in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Indeed, after 1850 the stock value of slaves rapidly increased, Roger Ransom and Richard Such claim.[100] Especially in the decade preceding the Civil War, slaves left in urban areas were sold to cotton planters in the Deep South. Owners –capitalistically– cashed in on their cattle, as Smith writes.[101]

But at a time when business was booming, slavery and with it the South's economic system was under attack from different angles. The second wave of abolitionism was much more a threat to slavery than the first wave, because as mentioned previously, with the help of Garrison Cofounder of *The Liberator*, "the second wave, from the late 1820s through the Civil War, saw abolitionism coalesce into a social and political movement that called for an immediate end to slavery in the United States. This wave grew out of the obvious failure of first-wave abolitionism to stop the spread and growth of American slavery," Adam Rothman underscores.[102]

An additional decisive component of the Second Wave of Abolitionism was that black and white fought together. Manisha Sinha points out that "interracial immediatism brought together the moral and religious sensibility of white reform efforts and the antislavery tactics of early abolitionists in Britain and the United States with the black tradition of protest."[103] Furthermore, "free Northern blacks, by the exercise of public speech and concrete political activism, were able to craft a tradition of protest that shook the foundations of slavery and racial prejudice," Patrick Rael emphasizes.[104]

While parts of the North and Europe steadily transitioned to industrialized societies

[100] Roger Ransom, "Economics of the Civil War," edited by Robert Whaples, August 24, 2001. http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economics-of-the-civil-war/, accessed April 23, 2020.
[101] Smith, *Debating slavery*, 79.
[102] Adam Rothman, "The Truth About Abolition: The movement gets the big, bold history it deserves," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-truth-about-abolition/471483/, accessed October 6, 2019.
[103] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause : A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 195.
[104] Patrick Rael, "Free Black Activism in the Antebellum North," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 2 (2006): 216.

and the South dug deeper into investments in cotton and plantations, the ethics of slavery and its economic effects on the South's economy were called into question. Without innovation and diversification, the South's slave-based economy failed to provide the vast majority of people with a decent living standard and proper work. "Proslavery advocates asserted because of black slavery, that whites in the South would not have to engage in manual labor for the benefits of others, in contrast to factory workers in the North," Charles Bolton points out.[105] A significant proportion of the South was "landless, dependent and seemingly trapped in poverty", Bolton adds.[106] Only Southern planters who could rely on the large external demand of money crops, reaped the benefits of the plantation economy.

In Washington, Southern politicians were under pressure from some Northern colleagues to end slavery as well. The South, overwhelmed by the attacks, after 1830, fought back. Abolitionists' books and pamphlets had started to shift public opinion in relation to slavery. This is what planters feared the most. This decade saw the birth of the South's aggressive response to abolitionism. Drew Gilpin Faust agrees with Rothman and writes "although proslavery thought demonstrated remarkable consistency from the seventeenth century on, it became in the South of the 1830s, forties, and fifties more systematic and self-conscious; it took on the characteristics of a formal ideology with its resulting social movement."[107] The South for the first time in its long history had to invent justifications for slavery, as Mississippian Senator, Sociologist and lawyer Henry Hughes pointed out.[108]

Interestingly, proslavery arguments were not aimed at Northerners, but rather at Southerners, because "few of our own people understand it in its philosophical and economical bearings," a South Carolinian advocate of slavery wrote.[109] Proslavery

[105] Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South : Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 42.
[106] Ibid., 42.
[107] Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery*, 56.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 6.

propaganda was aimed at a group excluded and surely not profiting from the South's peculiar institution. Bolton categorizes poor whites as the "economic losers" of the South's slave-based system and adds, "if united could have posed a formidable danger to the institution of slavery."[110]

With the benefit of hindsight, Southern intellectuals, with great vigor, fought a losing battle against abolitionism. Countless essays have been written and published and, in Congress, Southern politicians made strenuous speeches in the defense of slavery. John Calhoun, Edmund Ruffin and James Henry Hammond were three leading figures of a larger group of prominent people defending slavery during the late antebellum period. The question this chapter answers is; what were the main economic arguments John Calhoun, Edmund Ruffin and James Henry Hammond used in their defense of slavery?

Calhoun was a planter, but above all a politician. He leaned heavily on states' rights in his defense of slavery. Every state's constitution, he argued, was sovereign to federal laws. A strong opponent of federal influence and advocate of minority rights in his state, he was most concerned with the theoretical justification of slavery. He moreover did everything in his power to thwart of federal tax rises which were aimed at weakening the South's economy. The first section of this chapter focusses on Calhoun's more or less abstract defense of slavery.

Before the 1830s, Edmund Ruffin, not a politician but essayist, was primarily known for his agricultural work. In 1832 Ruffin published his first book and "within a decade, he had become the most influential agricultural leader in the region and one of the great figures in American agricultural history," J. Carlyle Sitterson asserts.[111] Later, Ruffin became an ardent advocate of secession, traveling around the US voicing his support for slavery. Personal

[110] Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South*, 43.
[111] Edmund, J. Ruffin, Carlyle Sitterson and American Council of Learned Societies, *An Essay on Calcareous Manures* (John Harvard Library: Cambridge, 1961), VII.

historical analyses combined with Ruffin's extreme racist views are the basis on which he defended slavery. Historic misconceptions were an essential part of his defense of human bondage and, like other Southern advocates, he compared free labor to slavery and concluded the latter was by far the best system.

James Henry Hammond, South Carolinian career politician, also compared free labor in growing cities to slavery and focused even more on the presumed positive aspects of the South's peculiar institution. Hammond argued that slavery was a much more humane system than free labor and pointed out in which ways the US profited from slavery. He moreover used favorable statistics to back up his claim about the profitability of slavery as a system. Interestingly, like mentioned in the introduction, in their defense of slavery, none devoted any attention to low taxes for the rich, quality of infrastructure and the political economy of the antebellum South that visitors complained about so much.

John Calhoun

"The first Southern leader of national stature to embrace the proslavery argument was John C. Calhoun," Ashworth writes.[112] As a member of the Democratic Party during the Second Party System, described by Ransom as "an arrangement that dominated the American political scene throughout the 1830s and 1840s," Calhoun was a leading national figure.[113] The proslavery agenda by this party was pushed with great success. "The Democratic party from the time of its creation until the Civil War was a truly national organization, able to recruit support and win elections in every section of the Union," Ashworth points out.[114]

In the hands of Calhoun, the state of South Carolina underwent a significant ideological change. Politics here during the 1820s saw a transition from "the most ardent nationalist to one of economic flux in which everything bad was blamed on the measures of

[112] Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic Vol. 1.*, 201.
[113] Ransom, *Conflict and compromise*, 85.
[114] Asworth *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic Vol. 1.*, 42.

the federal government," Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager and William E. Leuchtenburg write.[115] Calhoun indeed blamed every misfortune on the federal government, abolitionists and sometimes foreigners. Calhoun lacked the ability to self-reflect on the possible weaknesses of slavery. "His understanding, and his misunderstanding, of the sectional controversy in 1850 were both highly typical of southerners in the final antebellum decades," Ashworth underscores.

Against the backdrop of Jefferson's agrarian ideal and focus on individual liberty, undisturbed by interference from the federal government, Southern Democrats did everything in their power to protect their basis of wealth, Mary Beth Norton contends.[116] His stance on state's rights and individual liberty made him an outsider and he found it difficult to adhere to party discipline. The "far too serious" Calhoun moreover was hard to approach and by no means a sociable person, Niven asserts.[117] He could afford to be the "enfant terrible" of his party because of the solid electoral base of his home state.

After 1830, Calhoun unofficially led a social movement of politicians and intellectuals in favor of slavery, until his sudden death due to tuberculosis in March 1850. His focus was very much on shaping the public opinion of ordinary people. Proslavery arguments aimed at the poor varied, but had one thing in common after 1830; everything related to the South's slave-based society and economy was argued to be not equal to, but far superior to free societies. In many ways white Southerners were the losers of the South's peculiar institution but ideologically needed to be and remain separated from the black population. Slaves and poor white southerners combined could pose a real threat to the South's stability, politicians correctly realized.

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[115] Morison, Steele and Leuchtenberg, *The Growth of the American Republic Vol.I*. (Oxford University Press, 1980), 425.
[116] Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People and a Nation, Volume I: to 1877* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 287-288.
[117] John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 123.

The "reluctant Jacksonian," in a rapidly changing world argued that the way forward for the US was slavery. "I venture nothing in predicting that the experience of the next generation will fully test how vastly more favorable our condition of society is to that of other sections for free and stable institutions, provided we are not disturbed by the interference of others," Calhoun said in 1837.[118] Almost two decades before his speech in the Senate, during the Missouri debates of 1819-1820, "no man in public office was more sensitive to the developing slavery issue than John C. Calhoun," because, "he had watched with alarm the growth in population and wealth of the free states compared to that of his own region," Niven asserts.[119] South Carolina was not nearly as prosperous as Calhoun claimed. Morison, Commager and Leuchtenburg point out, "as tariff schedules rose by successive acts of Congress, and the country as a whole grew richer, South Carolina remained stationary in population, and declined in wealth."[120]

In addition to South Carolina's economic and demographic hardships, the state's "more enterprising planters" moved to the black belts of Mississippi and Alabama, enriching cities like Mobile and New Orleans, instead of Charleston. Calhoun had studied market trends for years and was better informed about South's staple-producing states than fellow politicians, but was still convinced that slavery was the one and only system suited for the South.[121] Mary Beth Norton agrees and points out a complete turnaround of the economy would indeed have been necessary.[122]

Calhoun's mark on the South's political agenda is hard to overestimate. Together with

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[118] Finkelman, *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA [etc.] : Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 60.
[119] Niven, 201.
[120] Morison, Steele and Leuchtenberg *The Growth of the American* Republic, 425.
[121] Niven, 128.
[122] Norton, Mary Beth. *A People & a Nation : A History of the United States*. (Complete ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 253.
Norton argues circumstances dictated that the most profitable investment lay in the continuation of a plantation economy. Only if the textile factories in Britain and New-England kept buying cotton, investments in slavery remained profitable. There is some truth in Beth's statement; industrialization or even abolition of slavery necessitated a complete turnaround of the economy.

Secretary of State Daniel Webster and senator from Kentucky Henry Clay, Calhoun is part of "the so-called "Great Triumvirate" of sectional statesmen whose legislative compromises held the nation together during the tumultuous decades leading to the Civil War."[123] Calhoun had an additional political advantage over colleagues, as he enjoyed everlasting support from prominent planter families of South-Carolina's Lowcountry. South Carolina's aristocracy dominated politics in a system of census suffrage, similar to that of most European countries at the time.[124]

The entire political economy of the South was run by the slave-owning elite. In Washington, Calhoun in essence functioned as the leader of a lobby group of self-serving slave owners. Common people, without slaves and fertile lands, were arrogantly ignored and treated with utter contempt. The majority of people in his state were yeoman farmers of whom two-thirds owned no slaves and free whites in the South Carolinian Upcountry.[125] Cole Blease Graham writes about the elite that "under the 1776 constitution, political power stayed firmly in legislative hands, and legislative privilege continued through dominance of the Commons House of Assembly."[126] Planters evidently cared little for the economic development of the South. They remained in power by skillfully using the state's unique system to their benefit and Calhoun even proudly proclaimed that South Carolina was the only state where the election of its Governor was not in the hands of common people.

Calhoun admitted that slavery was the South's "peculiar institution," but a "positive good" nonetheless. As Martineau observed in the aftermath of the Tariffs, Calhoun increasingly felt threatened by the North's anti-slavery agenda but refused to make any

[123] "The "Famous Five" https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Famous_Five_Seven.html, Accessed September 27, 2019.
[124] Graham Cole Blease JR, *The South Carolina State Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.
[125] Norton, *A People & a Nation: A History of the United States*, 256.
[126] Graham, 18.

concessions. “I do not belong to the school which holds that aggression is to be met by concession,” he declared in the Senate, adding that he wanted to meet “the enemy on the frontier.”[127] His biggest fear, however, wasn’t ideological or even military aggression, it was public opinion and the possible adverse effects for the South’s economy. In his famous 1837 anti-abolitionist speech in the senate, he underscored that “as widely as this incendiary spirit has spread, it has not yet infected this body, or the great mass of the intelligent and business portion of the North; but unless it be speedily stopped, it will spread and work upwards till it brings the two great sections of the Union into deadly conflict.”[128]

Proceeding his elaborate plea, Calhoun also tried to convince listeners of his claim that the federal government had no jurisdiction in matters such as slavery because states’ rights were sovereign to federal laws. By doing this, Calhoun tried to distract everyone from his real intentions, which were economic and not constitutional. He knew Southern businesses were extremely vulnerable to the spreading of anti-slavery propaganda in in the North. “Already it has taken possession of the pulpit, of the schools, and, to a considerable extent, the press; those great instruments by which the mind of the rising generation will be formed,” he said.[129] Northern and British manufacturers needed to stay convinced of slavery’s grace. Not in the least part because Calhoun owned 70 to 80 slaves and 1000 acres of land himself.[130]

Calhoun had little concern for the South’s economic development and employment figures and only took poor white Southerners into consideration when it politically benefitted him. In an 1850 Article in Fredrick Douglass’ newspaper *The North Star*, the unknown author wrote, “fearfully as slavery bears upon the blacks of the South, its effects upon the vast

[127] Finkelman, 55.
[128] Ibid., 56.
[129] Ibid., 57.
[130] Joseph A. Scoville, “A Visit to Fort Hill by a Traveler,” (July 26, 1849) in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun Volume XXVI: 1848-1849*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 527-529.

majority of the whites is no way less dreadful. Slavery degrades all labor, and with it all laborers."[131]

Planters and proslavery politicians indeed did not care much for matters outside the realm of slavery, as the following comparison between wage and slave labor illustrates. Their strange analogy of wage and slave labor remained one of the most prevailing arguments of advocates of slavery in the late antebellum period. George Fitzhugh, a controversial American social theorist went even further and argued that slavery should exist "without regard to race or color" and argued that Human bondage "was an ideal form of social security, ensuring subsistence to all and eliminating the poverty and suffering experienced by free laborers of England and the industrialized North," Faust writes.[132]

Slaves –unlike free laborers– in this analogy were said to be looked after around the clock, ate decent food and were provided with appropriate housing. Martineau and Olmsted in their memoirs and later modern scholars prove these claims to be wrong, but it was not about evidence. Not a single scholar is under the impression that laborers and even children in factories during the Industrial Revolution lived cheerful lives. "Consider it well established that the industrial revolution was a disaster for the working classes," Clark Nardelli points out.[133] Southern advocates of slavery were right about low wages, poor housing, malnutrition and exploitation of millions of workers in free societies, but at the same time denied any shortcomings of their own communities. The use of this kind of circular reasoning did nothing more than deeming wage labor worse than slavery, thereby winning the argument by default. In this invented paradigm, paying jobs for free southerners on plantations or perhaps factories were considered inferior to slavery, therefore keeping the poor poor.

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[131] Keri Leigh Merrit, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge Studies on the American South, 2017), 62.
[132] Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery*, 274.
[133] Clark Nardelli, "*Industrial Revolution and the Standard of Living*," https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/IndustrialRevolutionandtheStandardofLiving.html, accessed October 10, 2019.

The atmosphere in the Senate on February 6, 1837 was tense when Calhoun applied the same rhetoric about wage and slave labor in his response to the abolitionist petition. President John Quincy Adams had angered Southern members because he wanted them to discuss a petition sent by abolitionists. The president and Calhoun, by discussing the petition, undermined the so-called "gag rule." The rule stated that anything relating to slavery was not allowed to be discussed directly in the Senate.[134]

Calhoun disobeyed the unwritten rule and about the living standards of slaves and wage workers he said; "compare his condition with the tenants of the poor houses in the more civilized portions of Europe – look at the sick, and the old and infirm slave, on one hand, in the midst of his family and friends, under the kind superintending care of his master and mistress, and compare it with the forlorn and wretched condition of the pauper in the poor house."[135]

The statesman in the Senate argued once more that slavery was the most desirable system of the two and pointed out that the enslavement of certain so-called "intellectual and moral inferior individuals," was simply a fact of life. He added, "I hold then, that there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other."[136] The conflict between labor and capital as he called it, was necessary for a society as developed and advanced as the South.

In addition, Calhoun was completely certain of a bright economic future for the South. In an 1838 speech, he predicted that the South would be tremendously more favorable and wealthy than a free society, because slavery, "was the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world," and one "who concentrates in himself the united interests of capital

[134] Niven, 200.
[135] John C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions", delivered in the Senate, February 6th, 1837.
[136] Finkelman, 59.

and labor, of which he is the common representative," he said.[137] The harmonious separation between master and slave pre-emptively defused any form social conflict, Calhoun adhered.[138]

Planters furthermore argued that the South capitalized on slavery, because its economic growth was higher than its northern counterpart between 1840 and 1860. Roger L. Ransom writes, "although the South as a region experienced substantial growth in the antebellum period, this expansion was largely the result of production of large slave plantations."[139] Moreover, planters had to move westward, away from depleted lands, to maintain their level of wealth. Income growth per capita thus grew, but it does not represent actual growth. Moving planters did not represent a region's economic growth measured in income per capita, it merely reflected that group's own extraordinary wealth, Smith underscores.[140] Slavery's efficiency was not the foundation for the South's economic growth and development. It was external demand. In 1975, Gavin Wright wrote:

> The profitability and apparent efficiency of slave labor, the high regional growth rates, and the sanguinity of slave owners all rested on an inherently impermanent foundation: the extraordinary growth of world demand for cotton between 1820 and 1860. As the demand for cotton collapsed and then stagnated between 1860 and 1900, the economic successes of slavery would not have persisted. In particular, slave prices would have declined, the growth rate of regional income would have been drastically reduced, and much of the superior measured "efficiency" of slave labor would have evaporated.[141]

[137] Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! : An American History. Vol. 1: To 1877*, https://wwnorton.com/college/history/foner2/contents/ch11/documents02.asp, accessed November 2, 2019.
[138] Finkelman, 60.
[139] Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise*, 51.
[140] Smith, *Debating slavery*, 85.
[141] Gavin Wright, "Slavery and the Cotton Boom," *Explorations in Economic History* 12, no. 4 (1975): 439.

The presumed combined interest of master and slave, superior living conditions of enslaved people and economic prosperity for everyone in the country, were concocted narratives of a man fighting a losing battle against a shifting public opinion in the US and abroad in relation to slavery.

Edmund Ruffin

Virginia planter Edmund Ruffin was an even more militant defender of slavery of the late antebellum period. Avery Craven's biography and Ruffin's Diary, "help us understand the mind of this Southern extremist," Fred Hobson emphasizes.[142] Ruffin not only threatened to take up arms against abolitionists and "Yankees," but he actually did. Contrary to Calhoun, who tried to keep the Union intact, Ruffin pointed out that "having always been weak in constitution, & generally in delicate health," he was a keen advocate of secession. In 1859, at the age of 65 years, surprised he had even made it to that age, he enrolled in a militia company to attend the execution of John Brown, an American abolitionist.[143] [144]

Ruffin's unhinged behavior was remarkable, even for a proslavery advocate in the 1850s. "In the end he became a kind of Peter the Hermit going about from one seceding convention to another to encourage action," Craven writes.[145] Eventually succeeding in his mission to secede, he fired one of the first shots of the Civil War at Ford Sumter.[146] In the first of three diaries he kept called *Toward Independence*, Ruffin is seen proudly dressed in military array on the picture that was taken seven days after the outbreak of the Civil War on April 19, 1861.[147] His proslavery arguments include broad and mostly uninformed historical

[142] Fred Hobson, "Anticipations of the Future; or The Wish-Fulfillment of Edmund Ruffin," *Southern Literary Journal* 10, no. 1 (1977): 85.
[143] Edmund Ruffin and William Kauffman Scarborough, *The diary of Edmund Ruffin. Vol. I: Toward independence, October 1856-April, 1861* (Baton Rouge [etc.]: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 262.
[144] Finkelman, 61.
[145] Ruffin and Scarborough, *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, XIII.
[146] Edmund Ruffin, *Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2019, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. July, 20 1998, accessed October 6, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edmund-Ruffin.
[147] Ruffin and Scarborough, *The diary of Edmund Ruffin. Vol. I*.

analyses of the world's "savage tribes", riddled with what he called factual chronicles about the lack of intellectual capabilities of so-called uncultured peoples. Ruffin claimed to speak for all "lower individuals," but the roots of his proslavery arguments were found in theories of race. On February 20, 1857 in correspondence with the Minister to Nicaragua, Ruffin wrote "taken altogether,& throughout Central America, the people are worthless, & afford no hope of their improvement. They must give way to the Anglo-Saxon race-& their extinction will be a benefit to America."[148]

For the US, a turbulent decade started with the Compromise of 1850. However, "many Southerners agreed with the *Louisville Journal* that a weight seemed to be lifted from the heart of America," asserted *The New Orleans Picayune*, and that "contentions and bickerings will cease, and harmony be again restored. We hope that the question is now definitely settled."[149] Seven years after the Union was saved from disintegrating, Ruffin in 1857 published his famous essay *The Political Economy of Slavery*. Certainly no weight was lifted from the heart of America during the last decade of the antebellum. The Compromise had only temporarily circumvented the armed conflict that many expected to eventually break out.

Ruffin was born into the Virginia planter class. Also known as the father of soil chemistry, Craven writes, he inherited the Marlbourne tobacco plantation from his father, 17 miles north of Richmond in the county of Hanover in Virginia.[150] The plantation is his burial place.[151] Ruffin chose to stubbornly repeat what Calhoun had claimed in the 1830s and 1840s about the benefits of slavery in comparison to free labor. The former summoned up all kinds of privations and sufferings of people without masters in the past had to cope with, all the way up to the age of industrialization and underscored that, "a good and proper remedy for this

[148] Ruffin and Scarborough, 39.
[149] Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 166.
[150] Ruffin and Kauffman, *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, Vol. I* ,VIII.
[151] Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service 16 December, 1974, https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/5d50655a-a5ab-4294-b1a6-86763f66e81a, accessed October 7, 2019.

evil, if it could be applied, would be the enslaving of these reckless, wretched drones and cumberers of the earth, and thereby compelling them to habits of labor, and in return satisfying their wants for necessaries, and raising them and their progeny in the scale of humanity, not only physically but morally and intellectually."[152]

Apart from racist arguments, Ruffin used historical justifications for slavery. He strived for the continuation of slavery in states where it already existed and aimed to implement the institution in new states added to the Union. He wrote, "there was no country, in the most ancient time in history, of which the people had made considerable advances in industry or refinement, in which slavery had not been previously and long established, and in general use."[153] As a scientist Ruffin realized land depletion in the old slave states ruled out future intensive agriculture. He recognized it was crucial for slavery's survival to keep moving to new fertile lands in the Southwest. Historic justifications of slavery, like scientific ones, were just a distraction from the real reason. They were both efforts to defend the plantation economy.

Ruffin considered that "savage people" were not capable enough of improving their own lives without the kind care of white masters. Enslavement, in essence, was their redemption, he emphasized. Little faith Ruffin had in the opposite of slavery, which is free labor. Indolence among free workers was a considerable waste of productivity in free societies, Ruffin pointed out in his essay. He exaggerated the free workers' disposition to laziness and argued that at times when the demand for labor was much greater than the supply, they "work no more than compelled by necessity."[154] Ruffin knew he was wrong, when he accused free societies of being backward. Smith writes that, "slaveholders after all were men of the Atlantic world and marketplace, and as such, were aware of the physical,

[152] Edmund Ruffin, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (Washington Printed by L. Towers, 1857), 3.
[153] Ruffin, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 1.
[154] Finkelman, 64.

mental and technological revolution occurring in wage labor, capitalist societies."[155] The Industrial Revolution in free societies had increased rather than decreased the output of the average worker. Furthermore, planters also "industrialized" their plantations to the best of their knowledge, Smith contends.[156] Ralph Anderson and Robert Gallman quote Mark Schmitz, who wrote the following about slaves, "his productivity record in the foods should not be interpreted, as it sometimes has been interpreted, as evidence of his inefficiency, his backwardness, or his inability to embrace mechanization and new technique".[157]

Regardless of what Smith and Schmitz concluded, productivity on plantations was high, Ruffin argued. Slaves and masters, he argued, had a shared interest and the former was rewarded with food, clothing, and other allowances. Inconsequently, a few sentences later Ruffin pointed out that punishment was the primate motivator for slaves to work for their masters. An interesting turnaround of his plea, because punishment contradicts a relation based on shared interests between slave and master. Free people, at least in principle, work for their own benefit, slaves did not. As pointed out by Martineau and Olmsted, slaves and masters shared no interest at all. They described on several occasions, in detail, how slaves went out of their way to avoid and hinder work on the plantation.

Slavery moreover circumvented unemployment of the workforce and all entrepreneurial risks were carried by the planter, Ruffin adhered. Almost victimizing the planter class, he wrote, "when temporary evils, great loss, and distress, fall upon slaveholding countries, it is not the laboring class (as in a free society) that feels the first and heaviest infliction, but the masters and employers."[158] Slaves were cared for when ill and provided with their customary food even at times when masters only had "half of the previously

[155] Smith, 75.
[156] Ibid., 76.
[157] Ralph V. Anderson and Robert E. Gallman, "Slaves as Fixed Capital: Slave Labor and Southern Economic Development," *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (1977): 38.
[158] Finkelman, 71.

existing profits, or value of capital."[159] Additional "striking proof" of why slavery was the preferred system, was the suspension of workers' payments in the free states by the banks and their colleagues who, "were thrown out of employment, or employed only at much reduced wages".[160]

Aside from his ill-informed analyses of economic development in free states, Ruffin made some indisputable claims about slavery. Demand for slave labor in the Deep South increased during the decades preceding the Civil War. Also, slaves had always something to do. Bored slaves meant that their master lost money, so planters tried to rule out unemployment of slaves, if they can be compared to laborers in that sense. Additionally, redundant slaves, could be sold to the highest bidder. William Johnson, born into slavery said that his master, "used to say that if we didn't suit him he would put us in his pocket quick."[161]

Another part of the planter's investment was food. Low in quality as it often was, it was given to slaves, so that they could at least stay alive and remained healthy enough to work. Unemployment of the workforce in free societies could result in hunger mobs, "menacing New York with pillage", Ruffin wrote.[162] In contrast to an abundance of laborers free to fire or hire, slaves were living investments and therefore a commodity worth looking after. Ransom points out that, "slaves, in short, slave were *economic assets*, whose value was governed by the same factor that determined the price of other assets in the capital market."[163]

Ruffin furthermore rejected the idea of industrial operations. He argued they were less efficient than plantations and pointed out that in a free society every man worked for himself, resulting in loss of labor because of traditional family structures. Children and wives stayed at

[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 72.
[161] Benjamin Drew, *A North-side View of Slavery : The Refugee; Or, The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related by Themselves. With an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 29.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise*, 43.

home, he emphasized, the latter to attend to her "household duties."[164] Labor efficiency he continued, was lost in free societies, because "of the supposed fifty households, probably including no less than from 150 to 200 persons, there may be but the fifty men to labor for wages. All the many others capable of labor, are fully employed as menial servants and nurses for their respectable families."[165]

Again Ruffin made a false claim about working conditions in free societies. Nineteenth-century labor laws in the US and Britain, preventing women and children from working long hours in factories were nearly nonexistent and entire families, including children contributed their part to the family income. In the rapidly industrializing countries, "the child worker was a central if pitiful figure in both contemporary and classic accounts of the British industrial revolution," Jane Humphries points out.[166] Ruffin's angry defense of slavery completely missed its mark. It is clear his bogus explanation of labor relations, productivity of plantations and wellbeing of people in bondage was not what motivated him to defend slavery.

James Henry Hammond

A kindred spirit of Calhoun and Ruffin was planter and governor of South Carolina, James Henry Hammond. Fiercely and outspoken proslavery, Hammond married into a large enterprise. Rosellen Brown writes, "he ultimately became proprietor of 22 square miles, a number of plantation homes and possessor of more than 300 slaves."[167] In the 1850s and especially in the four years preceding the Civil War, profits from cotton were enormous,

[164] Finkelman, 74.
[165] Edmund Ruffin, *The political economy of slavery: or, The institution considered in regard to its influence on public wealth and the general welfare* (Washington: printed by L. Towers, 1857), 9-10.
[166] Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.
[167] Rosellen Brown, "Monster of all the Surveyed," *The New York Times*, Jan 29, 1989.

further enriching the Southern elite, D.A. Farnie underscores.[168] Hammond's possessions were the primary basis for his high profile in South Carolina. "More influential upon the Carolinian mind than what Hammond said, was what he was. He was the baron of his district and one of the great barons of the state. He owned thousands of acres of land and could ride for a day and still be master of all he saw," Beth Merritt writes.[169] Merritt emphasizes his importance, by pointing out he was one of thirty-eight planters with more than 300 slaves in Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas.

Hammond joined the Democratic party in 1842, three years later than Calhoun. The former resigned his congressional seat for the Nullifier Party in 1839 due to illness, Faust Writes in a short introductory biography.[170] Fascinated by the shortcomings of free societies, Hammond recovered from his "nervous ailment" in Europe.[171] Slavery and politics, like in many other prominent statesmen in antebellum America, very much interlaced in the person of Hammond. From 1828 to 1860 he represented his state for only a few years as representative, governor and senator, "but his officeholding was by no means a measure of his importance," merritt points out."[172] She argues that the importance of his pro-slavery activities outside the realm of politics, such as two letters to British anti-slavery agitator Thomas Clarkson defending slavery, are difficult to overestimate. On January 28, 1845, Hammond wrote, "it may be possibly, a novelty to you to encounter one who conscientiously believes the domestic slavery of these States to be not only an inexorable necessity for the present, but a moral and humane institution, productive of the greatest political and social advantages, and who is disposed, as I am, to defend it on these grounds."[173] In this letter,

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[168] D.A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press [etc.], 1979), 136-137.
[169] E. Merritt and J. Hammond, "James Henry Hammond: 1807-1864, *The Johns Hopkins University studies in historical and political science*, no 1. (1923): 451.
[170] Faust, 168.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Merritt, and Hammond, VII.
[173] James Henry Hammond to Thomas Clarkson, January 28, 1845, in *The Ideology of Slavery* (Louisiana State University Press 1981), 170.

Hammond argued that slavery was the bedrock of southern society. Thirteen years later in his speech before Senate when underscoring the significance of slavery, he metaphorically chose "mudsill", which is the lowest, most fundamental sill of a structure, usually placed on the ground.

Merritt somewhat underestimates Hammond's political career as a means to promote slavery. In 1835, after years of attacks on slavery by abolitionists when Hammond was still a member of the House of Representatives, he personally proposed the 21st Rule, better known as the previously mentioned "gag rule". It prevented the so-called "slavery question" from being discussed or recorded in Congress, enabling slavery to be written into the constitution behind closed doors of new territories in the South and Southwest.[174]

In the years that followed, Hammond argued that the crusade preached against slavery by abolitionists was as "ferocious as that of Peter the Hermit- destined, I believe, to be about as successful."[175] Certain that American slavery would survive abolitionism, he also advocated secession from the Union. Combining racism and economic prosperity, the statesman remained an articulate advocate of secession and slavery's expansion to new territories all the way up to and during the Civil War, which he did not survive.

Merritt writes that, "during his senatorship he made, in the Senate or at home, several widely heralded speeches in support of the cherished idea of a Southern nation."[176] Hammond became most famous or infamous for the "The Mudsill" or "Cotton is King" speech of March 4, 1858. It is often referred to as the Mudsill Speech, "because in it Hammond argues that blacks provide a natural floor, or mudsill, for American society," Finkelman writes.[177] Hammond said, "in all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform

[174] "The house Gag Rule," May 26 1836, https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1800-1850/The-House-of-Representatives-instituted-the-%E2%80%9Cgag-rule%E2%80%9D/, accessed October 30, 2019.
[175] James Henry Hammond to Thomas Clarkson, *The Ideology of Slavery,* 172.
[176] Merritt and Hammond, VII.
[177] Finkelman, 81.

the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement."[178]

Racism and prejudice in one form or another were always a key component of antebellum slavery's defense. In the second part of the speech before the Senate, Hammond concentrates more on the economic significance of slavery to the South's past and future development. His 1858 speech was a response to even further shifting public opinion against slavery in the North. The South's export-based economy completely depended on the American and British public turning a blind eye to the horrors of slavery. However, in the second half of the 1850s, Hammond and others' siding with slavery was often a response to, rather than an anticipation of certain developments beyond their influence. To illustrate, Ashworth writes, "the difficulty for the Democratic Party was that Northern society was generating an even deeper hostility towards slavery, even a southerners' confidence in their peculiar institution was soaring towards new heights."[179] In Springfield on June 16, 1858 and later in August of the same year, later president Abraham Lincoln poetically described the dangerous contrast in public opinion in the US. He said, "a house divided against itself cannot stand."[180]

Soaring southern confidence in slavery and therewith cotton as a commodity in the years leading up to the Civil War, made Hammond believe it dictated the global market. In his speech he emphasized that New England's and Britain's textile industries were so dependent on Southern Cotton that, "no power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king."[181] Additionally, in a speech in Barnwell, South Carolina on October 29, 1858, Hammond

[178] Ibid., 86.
[179] Ashworth, *Slavery, capitalism, and politics in the antebellum Republic Vol. 2*, 468.
[180] Abraham Lincoln, "Abraham Lincoln's House Divided Speech," August 1, 1858 (Great Neck Publishing, 2017).
[181] Finkelman, 85.

reaffirmed the South's strength and harmony by saying that, "our history proves that no man and no measure has yet been strong enough to stand against the South when united".[182]

He was wrong about Britain. The country did not come to the aid of the Confederacy at the outbreak of the Civil war, but more importantly, the global cotton market proved to be more dynamic than Hammond anticipated. Mitchel Broadus quotes D.A Farnie and writes that, "the "cotton famine" from the severe reduction of imports of the American staple during the Civil War was not as cataclysmic as often declared, "stocks on hand were large in anticipation of shortage, supplies of Indian cotton, though inferior, were stepped up to fill the gap, and superior Egyptian cotton was a resource."[183]

As one of the largest planters of the antebellum South, Hammond furthermore underlined cotton's sovereignty by analyzing the South's economic boom on the basis of a number of reports from the Secretary of the Treasury under President James Buchanan (1791-1868), Howell Cobb (1815-1868). Excluding gold, in 1857, internal trade and foreign merchandise re-exported taken together, according to the reports was worth $279,000,000 of domestic produce in total. Of this amount, $158,000,000 with an additional one third of $80,000,000 of exports of forestry products, provisions and breadstuffs added up to a total of $185,000,000 produced by the South. Two thirds of the total export value of the US was produced by the South, Hammond concluded.[184]

In the paragraph that follows, Hammond points out that the internal trade the South "sends" the North was not counted as exports in Cobb's reports. Also, by choosing the word send, rather than sold, he makes it sound as if the North received "tobacco, naval stores, rice and many minor articles," from the South free of charge.[185] On the contrary, nothing Southern

[182] Hammond, James Henry Hammond, *Selections from the letters and speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina* (New York, J. F. Trow & Co., printers, 1866), 343.
[183] Broadus Mitchell, "D. A. Farnie. The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 451, no. 1 (1980): 177.
[184] Finkelman, 84.
[185] Ibid.

planters cultivated was given away for free.

Indeed, planters were businessmen and always expected payment for delivered commodities. Based on these numbers, exports of raw products were much higher than those of the North, but "both the level of manufacturing capital and the level of manufactured output in the cotton South was much lower than in New England, the middle states, and the South as a whole," Smith asserts.[186]

This part of Hammond's pro-slavery argument is solely based on the export of raw materials. He never mentioned economic diversification as being potentially beneficial to the South. He maintained, "if I am right in my calculations as to $220,000,000 of surplus produce, there is not a nation on the face of the earth, with any numerous population, that can compete with us in produce *per capita*".[187] His reasoning was deeply flawed as modern scholars have pointed out. Produce per capita does not give an honest representation of who exactly produced, profited (or didn't) from the South's agrarian export based economy.

Towards the end of his speech, Hammond once more responded to the Senator from New York, William H. Seward. Hammond said, "the Senator from New York said yesterday that the whole world had abolished slavery. Aye, the *name*, but not the *thing*; all the powers of the earth cannot abolish that. God only can do it when he repeals the fiat, "the poor ye always have with you;" for the man who lives by daily labor, and scarcely lives at that, and who has to put out his labor in the market, and take the best he can get for it; in short, your whole class of manual laborers and "operatives," as you call them, are essentially slaves."[188] As pointed out before, the similarities of the dreadful lives of slaves and laborers in many ways resembled each other, but by maintaining that, "the difference between us is, that our slaves are hired for live and well compensated: there is no starvation, no begging, no want for

[186] Smith, *Debating Slavery*, 74.
[187] Finkelman, 85.
[188] Ibid., 87.

employment among our people, and not too much employment either" and that, "they are happy, content, unaspiring, and utterly incapable, from the intellectual weakness, ever to give us any trouble by their aspirations," Hammond, to say the least, painted a too rosy picture of the lives of slaves.[189] He even went so far as saying that Northerners, with the support of Southern Senators were flocking to the South because where else one could own "one hundred and sixty acres of land for nothing."[190] There was a reason why some of the South's land were valueless. As contemporary visitors concluded in their memoires, a significant proportion of the South's cultivated lands no longer held nutrition for new crops to grow on. It seems unlikely that Hammond, who owned an enormous amount of land, knew nothing about soil depletion in the South.

The Senator ended his plea with a threat aimed at the North. The North needed the South, not the other way around he underscored. He concluded, "the South have sustained you in a great measure. You are our factors. You bring and carry for us. One hundred and fifty million dollars of our money passes annually through your hands. Much of its sticks; all of it assists to keep your machinery together and in motion. Suppose we were to discharge you; suppose we were to take our business out of your hands; we should consign you to anarchy and poverty."[191]

These three gentlemen, as members of the South's slave-owning establishment, were part of a large collective of people desperately defending the peculiar institution that only they profited from. Well represented by politicians or actual politician themselves, in the three decades prior to the Civil War, advocates of slavery were lobbying for an institution that increasingly came under scrutiny from a various forces outside their influence. Calhoun, Ruffin and Hammond saw slavery slip out of their hands as the world around them changed

[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., 88.
[191] Ibid.

rapidly. In free societies, industrialization made production many times more efficient than slavery and quickly diversified the economy. Steering public opinion turned out very difficult for slavery's advocates, especially when the arguments they used were easily refuted by opponents of human bondage.

Conclusion

During the late antebellum, in the public debate, the discrepancy in arguments put forward by strangers visiting the South on the one hand, and slavery's apologists on the other hand, regarding the peculiar institution's impact on the economy in the public debate has been tremendous. In chapter 1, Martineau, Shaw and Olmsted underscored the widespread underdevelopment of the region's economy, while Calhoun, Ruffin and Hammond in chapter 2 argued the plantation economy had brought nothing but prosperity for the South. Most striking is that travelers described in detail, each in their own way, how the South's economy lacked efficiency, profitability and progressiveness.

The gentlemen pushing slavery's agenda on the other hand were a lot less elaborate in their defense. Sincere or not, apologists very much romanticized slavery and the southern way of life. Indeed, they were overly optimistic about slavery. The many drawbacks of the plantation economy, described by visitors and abolitionists, were not discussed in their articles, essays and books. Defenders of slavery, talked about little more than the importance of cotton to the national economy, its efficiency and how slaves were treated better than wage workers in the North and in Britain. Never once did they mention the state of the south's infrastructure, the living standard of poor white people and slaves, and the South's near total dependency on overseas markets.

In the mid 1830's, Martineau was amazed by how the strong focus on slavery had retarded the economic development of a region with a lot of potential. Planters' self-interest and irresponsibility meant that roads, bridges and cities failed to properly develop, she argued. Everything slavery touched moreover, worsened, rather than improved living standards and land values in the South.

Shaw, roughly 30 years later, had come to the same conclusion. With his own eyes he

saw the economic mess caused by the South's heavy dependence on money crops cultivated by slaves. Human bondage, he underscored, was the parasite that needed to be removed from the South. Shaw utilized statistics available at the time to point out that the South's economy had never been properly developed, because slavery obstructed its progress in every sense. Only the elite, he argued had managed to reap the benefits from the rich soil of the southern states. The only way forward, he maintained was the total abolition of slavery and therewith the end of the all-powerful master-class. Only then the economy, he predicted, would begin to diversify and manufacturing would begin to take place.

Olmsted, like Martineau and Shaw underscored slavery's negative impact on the South's economy. He emphasized that, apart from further enrichment of the elite, little economic progress had been made after two centuries of slavery. After just a few weeks of traveling through the South, he was dumbfounded by the severe negligence of plantation houses, infrastructure and living conditions of the majority of the population. The old slave states of the South were supposed to be the epicenters of wealth and prosperity, but they weren't.

Olmsted, like Shaw, recognized the connection between slavery and abysmal living conditions of millions of poor whites who essentially did nothing all day. Unemployment rates in the South were high, because of planters' reluctance to hire whites. Also, poor whites refused to work "slave jobs" they deemed to be inferior. This created a vicious circle of widespread unemployment in the South. Olmsted identified this as an intrinsic flaw of the slave economy.

Work done by slaves on plantations was also condemned by Olmsted. The output on plantations was according to Olmsted remarkably low. Productivity partially suffered because slaves did everything in their power to slow and hinder work. Different than in the North where free workers, he argued, had a financial incentive to work hard, slaves loathed every

moment of their imprisonment, hence the planter's constant fear of escapees. Without any hope for a better future, slavery's productivity would never match that of free workers and therewith would never be able to compete with free societies.

On the other side of the isle sat the gentleman of the South, the rich establishment of men, whose main focus was cashing in on their plantations. It is striking how Southern planters perceived slavery's impact on the South's economy. Slavery had indeed brought extreme wealth to the elite. Ruffin and Hammond's silence about their region's neglected infrastructure, thousands of acres of depleted farm land, illiteracy and widespread poverty, is proof they only had their enterprises in mind when writing about the superiority of the slave economy.

For them the public discourse concerning the efficiency, profitability and progressiveness of the plantation economy was personal. Calhoun and the generations before him had acquired wealth equal to that of the highest ranks of the European aristocracy, so it's no wonder he advocated for its preservation and expansion. By embarking on a charm-offensive, pointing out all the positive sides of slavery and blaming free states for their wrongdoings, Calhoun did his utmost best to prevent the antislavery public opinion from spreading any further. His effort to steer the public debate away from slavery's many drawbacks, shows how much the Senator was aware of his class' social status, dependence on export of money crops and changes in public opinion.

Edmund Ruffin, in the decade preceding Calhoun's death, expanded on the latter's defense of slavery. The Virginian planter and agricultural expert had seen the severe land depletion with his own eyes and in the public discourse underscored that slavery needed to keep expanding to more fertile grounds in the West for its survival. Ruffin unlike Calhoun however regarded the North and the South as two different countries with incomparable economies. With this idea in mind, Ruffin became one of the first secessionists during the

antebellum era. Ruffin moreover underscored slavery's superiority over free labor. Deeply ingrained racism and utter contempt for the poor made him believe free laborers were inclined to indolence and violence. Bondsmen on the other hand behaved, because they shared a common interest with their master he believed.

Hammond carefully chose his words when he wrote about slavery being the mudsill of the South's society and economy. Public opinion in the North in the late 1850's had shifted even further away from the idea of a slave based plantation economy within the Union and he needed to demonstrate how vital the institution was for the South's future existence. Hammond argued there would be nothing left of the South's efficient and modern economy if slavery were to be abolished. He furthermore was forced to respond to abolitionists' claims relating to the exploitation of the slave population and slavery's inefficiency. He maintained slaves were cared for around the clock by their masters and in turn did their share on the plantation. Hammond assured the reader that both slave and master benefited of this system. This, he maintained was the reason slavery was more efficient than free labor. Additionally, the planter from South Carolina in his speech elaborated on cotton's significance to the American and world economy. The slave economy, depending on money crops cultivated by millions of slaves was, he adhered, of such significance to the world economy, not a single power dared to make war on it.

From the books and essays it has become clear that the late antebellum era was a time of intense public debate on slavery. Travelers have described the many drawbacks of slavery for the South's economy and regardless of criticism, slaveholders on the other hand were always keen to point out the many advantages of slavery for the South's economy. Modern scholars have devoted a lot of attention to the South's economy and its strong capitalistic characteristics, often based on economic models available these days. Future research however, should focus more on the nineteenth century debate on the efficiency, profitability

and progressiveness of the plantation economy by utilizing contemporary influential publications.

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