of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This was the first steamboat to navigate the internal waterways of the North American continent from one end to the other and remain capable of returning home. The technology was far from perfect—the *New Orleans* sank two years later after hitting a submerged sandbar covered in driftwood—but its successful trial promised a bright, new future for river-based travel.

And that future was, indeed, bright. Just five years after the *New Orleans* arrived in its city, 17 steamboats ran regular upriver lines. By the mid-1840s, more than 700 steamboats did the same. In 1860, the port of New Orleans received and unloaded 3,500 steamboats, all focused entirely on internal trade. These boats carried around 160,000 tons of raw product that merchants, traders, and agents converted into nearly $220 million in trade, all in a single year.[23] More than 80 percent of the yield was from cotton alone, the product of the same fields tilled, expanded, and sold over the preceding three decades. Only now, in the 1840s and 1850s, could those fields, plantations, and farms simply load

Gordon, pictured here, endured terrible brutality from his master before escaping to Union Army lines in 1863. He would become a soldier and help fight to end the violent system that produced the horrendous scars on his back. Matthew Brady, *Gordon*, 1863. Wikimedia.

their products onto a boat and wait for the profit, credit, or supplies to return from downriver.

The explosion of steam power changed the face of the South, and indeed the nation as a whole. Everything that could be steam-powered was steam-powered, sometimes with mixed results. Cotton gins, wagons, grinders, looms, and baths, among countless others, all fell under the net of this new technology. Most importantly, the South's rivers, lakes, and bays were no longer barriers and hindrances to commerce. Quite the opposite; they had become the means by which commerce flowed, the roads of a modernizing society and region. And most importantly, the ability to use internal waterways connected the rural interior to increasingly urban ports, the sources of raw materials—cotton, tobacco, wheat, and so on—to an eager global market.

Coastal ports like New Orleans, Charleston, Norfolk, and even Richmond became targets of steamboats and coastal carriers. Merchants, traders, skilled laborers, and foreign speculators and agents flooded the towns. In fact, the South experienced a a greater rate of urbanization between 1820 and 1860 than the seemingly more industrial, urban-based North. Urbanization of the South simply looked different from that seen in the North and in Europe. Where most northern and some European cities (most notably London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Paris) developed along the lines of industry, creating public spaces to boost the morale of wage laborers in factories, on the docks, and in storehouses, southern cities developed within the cyclical logic of sustaining the trade in cotton that justified and paid for the maintenance of an enslaved labor force. The growth of southern cities, then, allowed slavery to flourish and brought the South into a more modern world.

Between 1820 and 1860, quite a few southern towns experienced dramatic population growth, which paralleled the increase in cotton production and international trade to and from the South. The 27,176 people New Orleans claimed in 1820 expanded to more than 168,000 by 1860. In fact, in New Orleans, the population nearly quadrupled from 1830 to 1840 as the Cotton Revolution hit full stride. At the same time, Charleston's population nearly doubled, from 24,780 to 40,522; Richmond expanded threefold, growing from a town of 12,067 to a capital city of 37,910; and St. Louis experienced the largest increase of any city in the nation, expanding from a frontier town of 10,049 to a booming Mississippi River metropolis of 160,773.[24]

The city and the field, the urban center and the rural space, were inextricably linked in the decades before the Civil War. And that relationship

connected the region to a global market and community. As southern cities grew, they became more cosmopolitan, attracting types of people either unsuited for or uninterested in rural life. These people—merchants, skilled laborers, traders, sellers of all kinds and colors—brought rural goods to a market desperate for raw materials. Everyone, it seemed, had a place in the cotton trade. Agents, many of them transients from the North, and in some cases Europe, represented the interests of planters and cotton farmers in the cities, making connections with traders who in turn made deals with manufactories in the Northeast, Liverpool, and Paris.

Among the more important aspects of southern urbanization was the development of a middle class in the urban centers, something that never fully developed in the more rural areas. In a very general sense, the rural South fell under a two-class system in which a landowning elite controlled the politics and most of the capital, and a working poor survived on subsistence farming or basic, unskilled labor funded by the elite. The development of large urban centers founded on trade, and flush with transient populations of sailors, merchants, and travelers, gave rise to a large, highly developed middle class in the South. Predicated on the idea of separation from those above and below them, middle-class men and women in the South thrived in the active, feverish rush of port city life.

Skilled craftsmen, merchants, traders, speculators, and store owners made up the southern middle class. Fashion trends no longer required an honest function—such as a broad-brimmed hat to protect one from the sun, knee-high boots for horse riding, and linen shirts and trousers to fight the heat of an unrelenting sun. Silk, cotton, and bright colors came into vogue, especially in coastal cities like New Orleans and Charleston; cravats, golden brooches, diamonds, and "the best stylings of Europe" became the standards of urban middle-class life in the South.[25] Neighbors, friends, and business partners formed and joined the same benevolent societies. These societies worked to aid the less fortunate in society, the orphans, the impoverished, the destitute. But in many cases these benevolent societies simply served as a way to keep other people out of middle-class circles, sustaining both wealth and social prestige within an insular, well-regulated community. Members and partners married each other's sisters, stood as godparents for each other's children, and served, when the time came, as executors of fellow members' wills.

The city bred exclusivity. That was part of the rush, part of the fever of the time. Built on the cotton trade, funded by European and northeastern merchants, markets, and manufactories, southern cities became the

headquarters of the nation's largest and most profitable commodities—cotton and slaves. And they welcomed the world with open checkbooks and open arms.

V. Southern Cultures

To understand the global and economic functions of the South, we also must understand the people who made the whole thing work. The South, more than perhaps any other region in the United States, had a great diversity of cultures and situations. The South still relied on the existence of slavery; as a result, it was home to nearly four million enslaved people by 1860, amounting to nearly one third of the entire southern population.[26] Naturally, these people, though legally unfree, developed a culture all their own. They created kinship and family networks, systems of (often illicit) trade, linguistic codes, religious congregations, and even benevolent and social aid organizations—all within the grip of slavery, a system dedicated to extraction rather than development, work and production rather than community and emotion.

The concept of family, more than anything else, played a crucial role in the daily lives of slaves. Family and kinship networks, and the benefits they carried, represented an institution through which slaves could piece together a sense of community, a sense of feeling and dedication, separate from the forced system of production that defined their daily lives. The creation of family units, distant relations, and communal traditions allowed slaves to maintain religious beliefs, ancient ancestral traditions, and even names passed down from generation to generation in a way that challenged enslavement. Ideas passed between relatives on different plantations, names given to children in honor of the deceased, and basic forms of love and devotion created a sense of individuality, an identity that assuaged the loneliness and desperation of enslaved life. Family defined how each plantation, each community, functioned, grew, and labored.

Nothing under slavery lasted long, at least not in the same form. Slave families and networks were no exceptions to this rule. African-born slaves during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries engaged in marriages—sometimes polygamous—with those of the same ethnic groups whenever possible. This, most importantly, allowed for the maintenance of cultural traditions, such as language, religion, name practices, and even the rare practice of bodily scarring. In some parts of the South, such

as Louisiana and coastal South Carolina, ethnic homogeneity thrived, and as a result, traditions and networks survived relatively unchanged for decades. As the number of slaves arriving in the United States increased, and generations of American-born slaves overtook the original African-born populations, the practice of marriage, especially among members of the same ethnic group or even simply the same plantation, became vital to the continuation of aging traditions. Marriage was the most important aspect of cultural and identity formation, as it connected slaves to their own pasts and gave some sense of protection for the future.[27] By the start of the Civil War, approximately two thirds of slaves were members of nuclear households, each household averaging six people—mother, father, children, and often a grandparent, elderly aunt or uncle, and even "in-laws." Those who did not have a marriage bond, or even a nuclear family, still maintained family ties, most often living with a single parent, brother, sister, or grandparent.[28]

Many slave marriages endured for many years. But the threat of disruption, often through sale, always loomed. As the internal slave trade increased following the constitutional ban on slave importation in 1808 and the rise of cotton in the 1830s and 1840s, slave families, especially

Free people of color were present throughout the American South, particularly in urban areas like Charleston and New Orleans. Some were relatively well off, like this *femme de couleur libre* who posed with her mixed-race child in front of her New Orleans home, maintaining a middling position between free whites and unfree blacks. Free woman of color with quadroon daughter; late eighteenth-century collage painting, New Orleans. Wikimedia.

those established prior to the slaves' arrival in the United States, came under increased threat. Hundreds of thousands of marriages, many with children, fell victim to sale "downriver"—a euphemism for the near-constant flow of slave laborers down the Mississippi River to the developing Cotton Belt in the Southwest.[29] In fact, during the Cotton Revolution alone, between one fifth and one third of all slave marriages were broken up through sale or forced migration. But this was not the only threat. Planters and slave owners recognized that marriage was, in the most basic and tragic sense, a privilege granted and defined by them for their slaves. And as a result, many slaveholders used slaves' marriages, or the threats thereto, to squeeze out more production, counteract disobedience, or simply make a gesture of power and superiority.

Threats to family networks, marriages, and household stability did not stop with the death of a master. A slave couple could live their entire lives together, even having been born, raised, and married on the slave plantation, and, following the death of their master, find themselves at opposite sides of the known world. It only took a single relative, executor, creditor, or friend of the deceased to make a claim against the estate to cause the sale and dispersal of an entire slave community.

Enslaved women were particularly vulnerable to the shifts of fate attached to slavery. In many cases, female slaves did the same work as men, spending the day—from sunup to sundown—in the fields picking and bundling cotton. In some rare cases, especially among the larger plantations, planters tended to use women as house servants more than men, but this was not universal. In both cases, however, female slaves' experiences were different from those of their male counterparts, husbands, and neighbors. Sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and constant child-rearing while continuing to work the fields all made life as a female slave more prone to disruption and uncertainty. Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman from North Carolina, chronicled her master's attempts to sexually abuse her in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Jacobs suggested that her successful attempts to resist sexual assault and her determination to love whom she pleased was "something akin to freedom."[30] But this "freedom," however empowering and contextual, did not cast a wide net. Many enslaved women had no choice concerning love, sex, and motherhood. On plantations and small farms, and even in cities, rape was ever-present. Like the splitting of families, slave owners used sexual violence as a form of terrorism, a way to promote increased production, obedience, and power

relations. And this was not restricted to unmarried women. In numerous contemporary accounts, particularly violent slave owners forced men to witness the rape of their wives, daughters, and relatives, often as punishment, but occasionally as a sadistic expression of power and dominance.[31]

As property, enslaved women had no recourse, and society, by and large, did not see a crime in this type of violence. Racist pseudoscientists claimed that whites could not physically rape Africans or African Americans, as the sexual organs of each were not compatible in that way. State law, in some cases, supported this view, claiming that rape could only occur between either two white people or a black man and a white woman. All other cases fell under a silent acceptance.[32] The consequences of rape, too, fell to the victim in the case of slaves. Pregnancies that resulted from rape did not always lead to a lighter workload for the mother. And if a slave acted out against a rapist, whether that be her master, her mistress, or any other white attacker, her actions were seen as crimes rather than desperate acts of survival. For example, a nineteen-year-old slave named Celia fell victim to repeated rape by her master in Callaway County, Missouri. Between 1850 and 1855, Robert Newsom raped Celia hundreds of times, producing two children and several miscarriages. Sick and desperate in the fall of 1855, Celia took a club and struck her master in the head, killing him. But instead of sympathy and aid, or even an honest attempt to understand and empathize, the community called for the execution of Celia. On November 16, 1855, after a

The women in this photograph are Selina Gray and two of her daughters. Gray was the enslaved housekeeper to Robert E. Lee. National Park Service.

trial of ten days, Celia, the nineteen-year-old rape victim and slave, was hanged for her crimes against her master.[33]

Gender inequality did not always fall along the same lines as racial inequality. Southern society, especially in the age of cotton, deferred to white men, under whom laws, social norms, and cultural practices were written, dictated, and maintained. White women and free women of color lived in a society dominated, in nearly every aspect, by men. Denied voting rights, women of all statuses and colors had no direct representation in the creation and discussion of law. Husbands, it was said, represented their wives, as the public sphere was too violent, heated, and high-minded for women. Society expected women to represent the foundations of the republic, gaining respectability through their work at home, in support of their husbands and children, away from the rough and boisterous realm of masculinity. In many cases, too, law did not

The issue of emigration elicited disparate reactions from African Americans. Tens of thousands left the United States for Liberia, a map of which is shown here, to pursue greater freedoms and prosperity. Most emigrants did not experience such success, but Liberia continued to attract black settlers for decades. J. Ashmun, *Map of the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to Cape Palmas, including the colony of Liberia,* . . . 1830. Library of Congress.

protect women the same way it protected men. In most states, marriage, an act expected of any self-respecting, reasonable woman of any class, effectively transferred all of a woman's property to her husband, forever, regardless of claim or command. Divorce existed, but it hardly worked in a woman's favor, and often, if successful, it ruined the wife's standing in society and even led to well-known cases of suicide.[34]

Life on the ground in the cotton South, like the cities, systems, and networks on which it rested, defied the standard narrative of the Old South. Slavery existed to dominate, yet slaves formed bonds, maintained traditions, and crafted new culture. They fell in love, had children, and protected one another using the privileges granted them by their captors and the basic intellect allowed all human beings. They were resourceful, brilliant, and vibrant, and they created freedom where freedom seemingly could not exist. And within those communities, resilience and dedication often led to cultural sustenance. Among the enslaved, women, and the impoverished-but-free, culture thrived in ways that are difficult to see through the bales of cotton and the stacks of money sitting on the docks and in the countinghouses of the South's urban centers. But religion, honor, and pride transcended material goods, especially among those who could not express themselves that way.

VI. Religion and Honor in the Slave South

Economic growth, violence, and exploitation coexisted and mutually reinforced evangelical Christianity in the South. The revivals of the Second Great Awakening established the region's prevailing religious culture. Led by Methodists, Baptists, and to a lesser degree, Presbyterians, this intense period of religious regeneration swept along the southern backcountry. By the outbreak of the Civil War, most southerners who were affiliated with a religious denomination belonged to either the Baptist or Methodist faith.[35] Both churches in the South briefly attacked slavery before transforming into some of the most vocal defenders of slavery and the southern social order.

Southern ministers contended that God himself had selected Africans for bondage but also considered the evangelization of slaves to be one of their greatest callings.[36] Missionary efforts among southern slaves largely succeeded and Protestantism spread rapidly among African Americans, leading to a proliferation of biracial congregations and prominent independent black churches. Some black and white southerners forged positive

and rewarding biracial connections; however, more often black and white southerners described strained or superficial religious relationships.

As the institution of slavery hardened racism in the South, relationships between missionaries and Native Americans transformed as well. Missionaries of all denominations were among the first to represent themselves as "pillars of white authority." After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, plantation culture expanded into the Deep South, and mission work became a crucial element of Christian expansion. Frontier mission schools carried a continual flow of Christian influence into Native American communities. Some missionaries learned indigenous languages, but many more worked to prevent indigenous children from speaking their native tongues, insisting on English for Christian understanding. By the Indian removals of 1835 and the Trail of Tears in 1838, missionaries in the South preached a pro-slavery theology that emphasized obedience to masters, the biblical basis of racial slavery via the curse of Ham, and the "civilizing" paternalism of slave owners.

Slaves most commonly received Christian instruction from white preachers or masters, whose religious message typically stressed slave subservience. Anti-literacy laws ensured that most slaves would be unable to read the Bible in its entirety and thus could not acquaint themselves with such inspirational stories as Moses delivering the Israelites out of slavery. Contradictions between God's Word and master and mistress cruelty did not pass unnoticed by many enslaved African Americans. As former slave William Wells Brown declared, "slaveholders hide themselves behind the Church," adding that "a more praying, preaching, psalm-singing people cannot be found than the slaveholders of the South."[37]

Many slaves chose to create and practice their own versions of Christianity, one that typically incorporated aspects of traditional African religions with limited input from the white community. Nat Turner, the leader of the great slave rebellion, found inspiration from religion early in life. Adopting an austere Christian lifestyle during his adolescence, Turner claimed to have been visited by "spirits" during his twenties and considered himself something of a prophet. He claimed to have had visions, in which he was called on to do the work of God, leading some contemporaries (as well as historians) to question his sanity.[38]

Inspired by his faith, Turner led the most deadly slave rebellion in the antebellum South. On the morning of August 22, 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia, Nat Turner and six collaborators attempted to free the region's enslaved population. Turner initiated the violence by killing his master with an ax blow to the head. By the end of the day, Turner and his band,

This woodcut captured the terror felt by white southerners in the aftermath of Nat Turner's rebellion. After the rebellion, fearful white reactionaries killed hundreds of enslaved people—most of whom were unconnected to the rebellion—and the state created stricter, more limiting laws concerning slavery. African American Intellectual History Society.

which had grown to over fifty men, killed fifty-seven white men, women, and children on eleven farms. By the next day, the local militia and white residents had captured or killed all of the participants except Turner, who hid for a number of weeks in nearby woods before being captured and executed. The white terror that followed Nat Turner's rebellion transformed southern religion, as anti-literacy laws increased and black-led churches were broken up and placed under the supervision of white ministers.

Evangelical religion also shaped understandings of what it meant to be a southern man or a southern woman. Southern manhood was largely shaped by an obsession with masculine honor, whereas southern womanhood centered on expectations of sexual virtue or purity. Honor prioritized the public recognition of white masculine claims to reputation and authority. Southern men developed a code to ritualize their interactions with each other and to perform their expectations of honor. This code structured language and behavior and was designed to minimize conflict. But when conflict did arise, the code also provided rituals that would reduce the resulting violence.

The formal duel exemplified the code in action. If two men could not settle a dispute through the arbitration of their friends, they would

exchange pistol shots to prove their equal honor status. Duelists arranged a secluded meeting, chose from a set of deadly weapons, and risked their lives as they clashed with swords or fired pistols at one another. Some of the most illustrious men in American history participated in a duel at some point during their lives, including President Andrew Jackson, Vice President Aaron Burr, and U.S. senators Henry Clay and Thomas Hart Benton. In all but Burr's case, dueling helped elevate these men to prominence.

Violence among the lower classes, especially those in the backcountry, involved fistfights and shoot-outs. Tactics included the sharpening of fingernails and filing of teeth into razor-sharp points, which would be used to gouge eyes and bite off ears and noses. In a duel, a gentleman achieved recognition by risking his life rather than killing his opponent, whereas those involved in rough-and-tumble fighting achieved victory through maiming their opponent.

The legal system was partially to blame for the prevalence of violence in the Old South. Although states and territories had laws against murder, rape, and various other forms of violence, including specific laws against dueling, upper-class southerners were rarely prosecuted, and juries often acquitted the accused. Despite the fact that hundreds of duelists fought and killed one another, there is little evidence that many duelists faced prosecution, and only one, Timothy Bennett (of Belleville, Illinois), was ever executed. By contrast, prosecutors routinely sought cases against lower-class southerners, who were found guilty in greater numbers than their wealthier counterparts.

The southern emphasis on honor affected women as well. While southern men worked to maintain their sense of masculinity; so too southern women cultivated a sense of femininity. Femininity in the South was intimately tied to the domestic sphere, even more so than for women in the North. The cult of domesticity strictly limited the ability of wealthy southern women to engage in public life. While northern women began to organize reform societies, southern women remained bound to the home, where they were instructed to cultivate their families' religious sensibility and manage their household. Managing the household was not easy work, however. For women on large plantations, managing the household would include directing a large bureaucracy of potentially rebellious slaves. For most southern women who did not live on plantations, managing the household included nearly constant work in keeping families clean, fed, and well-behaved. On top of these duties, many southern women were required to help with agricultural tasks.

Female labor was an important aspect of the southern economy, but the social position of women in southern culture was understood not through economic labor but rather through moral virtue. While men fought to get ahead in the turbulent world of the cotton boom, women were instructed to offer a calming, moralizing influence on husbands and children. The home was to be a place of quiet respite and spiritual solace. Under the guidance of a virtuous woman, the southern home would foster the values required for economic success and cultural refinement. Female virtue came to be understood largely as a euphemism for sexual purity, and southern culture, southern law, and southern violence largely centered on protecting that virtue of sexual purity from any possible imagined threat. In a world saturated with the sexual exploitation of black women, southerners developed a paranoid obsession with protecting the sexual purity of white women. Black men were presented as an insatiable sexual threat. Racial systems of violence and domination were wielded with crushing intensity for generations, all in the name of keeping white womanhood as pure as the cotton that anchored southern society.

VII. Conclusion

Cotton created the antebellum South. The wildly profitable commodity opened a previously closed society to the grandeur, the profit, the exploitation, and the social dimensions of a larger, more connected, global community. In this way, the South, and the world, benefited from the Cotton Revolution and the urban growth it sparked. But not all that glitters is gold. Slavery remained and the internal slave trade grew to untold heights as the 1860s approached. Politics, race relations, and the burden of slavery continued beneath the roar of steamboats, countinghouses, and the exchange of goods. Underneath it all, many questions remained—chief among them, what to do if slavery somehow came under threat.

VIII. Reference Material

This chapter was edited by Andrew Wegmann, with content contributions by Ian Beamish, Amanda Bellows, Marjorie Brown, Matthew Byron, Steffi Cerato, Kristin Condotta, Mari Crabtree, Jeff Fortney, Robert Gudmestad, John Marks, Maria Montalvo, James Anthony Owen, Katherine Rohrer, Marie Stango, James Wellborn, Ben Wright, and Ashley Young.