

## I. THE BLACK WORKER

How black men, coming to America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, became a central thread in the history of the United States, at once a challenge to its democracy and always an important part of its economic history and social development

Easily the most dramatic episode in American history was the sudden move to free four million black slaves in an effort to stop a great civil war, to end forty years of bitter controversy, and to appease the moral sense of civilization.

From the day of its birth, the anomaly of slavery plagued a nation which asserted the equality of all men, and sought to derive powers of government from the consent of the governed. Within sound of the voices of those who said this lived more than half a million black slaves, forming nearly one-fifth of the population of a new nation.

The black population at the time of the first census had risen to three-quarters of a million, and there were over a million at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before 1830, the blacks had passed the two million mark, helped by the increased importations just before 1808, and the illicit smuggling up until 1820. By their own reproduction, the Negroes reached 3,638,808 in 1850, and before the Civil War, stood at 4,441,830. They were 10% of the whole population of the nation in 1700, 22% in 1750, 18.9% in 1800 and 11.6% in 1900.

These workers were not all black and not all Africans and not all slaves. In 1860, at least 90% were born in the United States, 13% were visibly of white as well as Negro descent and actually more than one-fourth were probably of white, Indian and Negro blood. In 1860, 11% of these dark folk were free workers.

In origin, the slaves represented everything African, although most of them originated on or near the West Coast. Yet among them appeared the great Bantu tribes from Sierra Leone to South Africa; the Sudanese, straight across the center of the continent, from the Atlantic to the Valley of the Nile; the Nilotic Negroes and the black and brown Hamites, allied with Egypt; the tribes of the great lakes; the Pygmies and the Hottentots; and in addition to these, distinct traces of both Berber and Arab blood. There is no doubt of the presence of all these various elements in the mass of 10,000,000 or more Negroes

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IN AMERICA, 1860-1880.  
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transported from Africa to the various Americas, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Most of them that came to the continent went through West Indian tutelage, and thus finally appeared in the United States. They brought with them their religion and rhythmic song, and some traces of their art and tribal customs. And after a lapse of two and one-half centuries, the Negroes became a settled working population, speaking English or French, professing Christianity, and used principally in agricultural toil. Moreover, they so mingled their blood with white and red America that today less than 25% of the Negro Americans are of unmixed African descent.

So long as slavery was a matter of race and color, it made the conscience of the nation uneasy and continually affronted its ideals. The men who wrote the Constitution sought by every evasion, and almost by subterfuge, to keep recognition of slavery out of the basic form of the new government. They founded their hopes on the prohibitions of the slave trade, being sure that without continual additions from abroad, this tropical people would not long survive, and thus the problem of slavery would disappear in death. They miscalculated, or did not foresee the changing economic world. It might be more profitable in the West Indies to kill the slaves by overwork and import cheap Africans; but in America without a slave trade, it paid to conserve the slave and let him multiply. When, therefore, manifestly the Negroes were not dying out, there came quite naturally new excuses and explanations. It was a matter of social condition. Gradually these people would be free; but freedom could only come to the bulk as the freed were transplanted to their own land and country, since the living together of black and white in America was unthinkable. So again the nation waited, and its conscience sank to sleep.

But in a rich and eager land, wealth and work multiplied. They twisted new and intricate patterns around the earth. Slowly but mightily these black workers were integrated into modern industry. On free and fertile land Americans raised, not simply sugar as a cheap sweetening, rice for food and tobacco as a new and tickling luxury; but they began to grow a fiber that clothed the masses of a ragged world. Cotton grew so swiftly that the 9,000 bales of cotton which the new nation scarcely noticed in 1791 became 79,000 in 1800; and with this increase, walked economic revolution in a dozen different lines. The cotton crop reached one-half million bales in 1822, a million bales in 1831, two million in 1840, three million in 1852, and in the year of secession, stood at the then enormous total of five million bales.

Such facts and others, coupled with the increase of the slaves to which they were related as both cause and effect, meant a new

world; and all the more so because with increase in American cotton and Negro slaves, came both by chance and ingenuity new miracles for manufacturing, and particularly for the spinning and weaving of cloth.

The giant forces of water and of steam were harnessed to do the world's work, and the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce and industry; and they not only could not be spared, if this new economic organization was to expand, but rather they became the cause of new political demands and alignments, of new dreams of power and visions of empire.

First of all, their work called for widening stretches of new, rich, black soil—in Florida, in Louisiana, in Mexico; even in Kansas. This land, added to cheap labor, and labor easily regulated and distributed, made profits so high that a whole system of culture arose in the South, with a new leisure and social philosophy. Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor, and a new labor problem, involving all white labor, arose both in Europe and America.

Thus, the old difficulties and paradoxes appeared in new dress. It became easy to say and easier to prove that these black men were not men in the sense that white men were, and could never be, in the same sense, free. Their slavery was a matter of both race and social condition, but the condition was limited and determined by race. They were congenital wards and children, to be well-treated and cared for, but far happier and safer here than in their own land. As the Richmond, Virginia, *Examiner* put it in 1854:

"Let us not bother our brains about what *Providence* intends to do with our Negroes in the distant future, but glory in and profit to the utmost by what He has done for them in transplanting them here, and setting them to work on our plantations. . . . True philanthropy to the Negro, begins, like charity, at home; and if Southern men would act as if the canopy of heaven were inscribed with a covenant, in letters of fire, that *the Negro is here, and here forever; is our property, and ours forever; . . . they would accomplish more good for the race in five years than they boast the institution itself to have accomplished in two centuries. . . .*"

On the other hand, the growing exploitation of white labor in Europe, the rise of the factory system, the increased monopoly of land, and the problem of the distribution of political power, began to send wave after wave of immigrants to America, looking for new freedom, new opportunity and new democracy.

The opportunity for real and new democracy in America was broad. Political power at first was, as usual, confined to property holders and an aristocracy of birth and learning. But it was never securely based on land. Land was free and both land and property were possible to nearly every thrifty worker. Schools began early to multiply and open their doors even to the poor laborer. Birth began to count for less and less and America became to the world a land of economic opportunity. So the world came to America, even before the Revolution, and afterwards during the nineteenth century, nineteen million immigrants entered the United States.

When we compare these figures with the cotton crop and the increase of black workers, we see how the economic problem increased in intricacy. This intricacy is shown by the persons in the drama and their differing and opposing interests. There were the native-born Americans, largely of English descent, who were the property holders and employers; and even so far as they were poor, they looked forward to the time when they would accumulate capital and become, as they put it, economically "independent." Then there were the new immigrants, torn with a certain violence from their older social and economic surroundings; strangers in a new land, with visions of rising in the social and economic world by means of labor. They differed in language and social status, varying from the half-starved Irish peasant to the educated German and English artisan. There were the free Negroes: those of the North free in some cases for many generations, and voters; and in other cases, fugitives, new come from the South, with little skill and small knowledge of life and labor in their new environment. There were the free Negroes of the South, an unstable, harried class, living on sufferance of the law, and the good will of white patrons, and yet rising to be workers and sometimes owners of property and even of slaves, and cultured citizens. There was the great mass of poor whites, disinherited of their economic portion by competition with the slave system, and land monopoly.

In the earlier history of the South, free Negroes had the right to vote. Indeed, so far as the letter of the law was concerned, there was not a single Southern colony in which a black man who owned the requisite amount of property, and complied with other conditions, did not at some period have the legal right to vote.

Negroes voted in Virginia as late as 1723, when the assembly enacted that no free Negro, mulatto or Indian "shall hereafter have any vote at the elections of burgeses or any election whatsoever." In North Carolina, by the Act of 1734, a former discrimination against Negro voters was laid aside and not reenacted until 1835. A complaint in South Carolina, in 1701, said:

"Several free Negroes were receiv'd, & taken for as good Electors as the best Freeholders in the Province. So that we leave it with Your Lordships to judge whether admitting Aliens, Strangers, Servants, Negroes, &c, as good and qualified Voters, can be thought any ways agreeable to King Charles' Patent to Your Lordships, or the English Constitution of Government." Again in 1716, Jews and Negroes, who had been voting, were expressly excluded. In Georgia, there was at first no color discrimination, although only owners of fifty acres of land could vote. In 1761, voting was expressly confined to white men.<sup>1</sup>

In the states carved out of the Southwest, they were disfranchised as soon as the state came into the Union, although in Kentucky they voted between 1792 and 1799, and Tennessee allowed free Negroes to vote in her constitution of 1796.

In North Carolina, where even disfranchisement, in 1835, did not apply to Negroes who already had the right to vote, it was said that the several hundred Negroes who had been voting before then usually voted prudently and judiciously.

In Delaware and Maryland they voted in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In Louisiana, Negroes who had had the right to vote during territorial status were not disfranchised.

To sum up, in colonial times, the free Negro was excluded from the suffrage only in Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. In the Border States, Delaware disfranchised the Negro in 1792; Maryland in 1783 and 1810.

In the Southeast, Florida disfranchised Negroes in 1845; and in the Southwest, Louisiana disfranchised them in 1812; Mississippi in 1817; Alabama in 1819; Missouri, 1821; Arkansas in 1836; Texas, 1845. Georgia in her constitution of 1777 confined voters to white males; but this was omitted in the constitutions of 1789 and 1798.

As slavery grew to a system and the Cotton Kingdom began to expand into imperial white domination, a free Negro was a contradiction, a threat and a menace. As a thief and a vagabond, he threatened society; but as an educated property holder, a successful mechanic or even professional man, he more than threatened slavery. He contradicted and undermined it. He must not be. He must be suppressed, enslaved, colonized. And nothing so bad could be said about him that did not easily appear as true to slaveholders.

In the North, Negroes, for the most part, received political enfranchisement with the white laboring classes. In 1778, the Congress of the Confederation twice refused to insert the word "white" in the Articles of Confederation in asserting that free inhabitants in each state should be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of free citizens of the several states. In the law of 1783, free Negroes were

recognized as a basis of taxation, and in 1784, they were recognized as voters in the territories. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, "free male inhabitants of full age" were recognized as voters.

The few Negroes that were in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont could vote if they had the property qualifications. In Connecticut they were disfranchised in 1814; in 1865 this restriction was retained, and Negroes did not regain the right until after the Civil War. In New Jersey, they were disfranchised in 1807, but regained the right in 1820 and lost it again in 1847. Negroes voted in New York in the eighteenth century, then were disfranchised, but in 1821 were permitted to vote with a discriminatory property qualification of \$250. No property qualification was required of whites. Attempts were made at various times to remove this qualification but it was not removed until 1870. In Rhode Island they were disfranchised in the constitution which followed Dorr's Rebellion, but finally allowed to vote in 1842. In Pennsylvania, they were allowed to vote until 1838 when the "reform" convention restricted the suffrage to whites.

The Western States as territories did not usually restrict the suffrage, but as they were admitted to the Union they disfranchised the Negroes: Ohio in 1803; Indiana in 1816; Illinois in 1818; Michigan in 1837; Iowa in 1846; Wisconsin in 1848; Minnesota in 1858; and Kansas in 1861.

The Northwest Ordinance and even the Louisiana Purchase had made no color discrimination in legal and political rights. But the states admitted from this territory, specifically and from the first, denied free black men the right to vote and passed codes of black laws in Ohio, Indiana and elsewhere, instigated largely by the attitude and fears of the immigrant poor whites from the South. Thus, at first, in Kansas and the West, the problem of the black worker was narrow and specific. Neither the North nor the West asked that black labor in the United States be free and enfranchised. On the contrary, they accepted slave labor as a fact; but they were determined that it should be territorially restricted, and should not compete with free white labor.

What was this industrial system for which the South fought and risked life, reputation and wealth and which a growing element in the North viewed first with hesitating tolerance, then with distaste and finally with economic fear and moral horror? What did it mean to be a slave? It is hard to imagine it today. We think of oppression beyond all conception: cruelty, degradation, whipping and starvation, the absolute negation of human rights; or on the contrary, we may think of the ordinary worker the world over today, slaving ten, twelve, or fourteen hours a day, with not enough to eat, compelled by

his physical necessities to do this and not to do that, curtailed in his movements and his possibilities; and we say, here, too, is a slave called a "free worker," and slavery is merely a matter of name.

But there was in 1863 a real meaning to slavery different from that we may apply to the laborer today. It was in part psychological, the enforced personal feeling of inferiority, the calling of another Master; the standing with hat in hand. It was the helplessness. It was the defenselessness of family life. It was the submergence below the arbitrary will of any sort of individual. It was without doubt worse in these vital respects than that which exists today in Europe or America. Its analogue today is the yellow, brown and black laborer in China and India, in Africa, in the forests of the Amazon; and it was this slavery that fell in America.

The slavery of Negroes in the South was not usually a deliberately cruel and oppressive system. It did not mean systematic starvation or murder. On the other hand, it is just as difficult to conceive as quite true the idyllic picture of a patriarchal state with cultured and humane masters under whom slaves were as children, guided and trained in work and play, given even such mental training as was for their good, and for the well-being of the surrounding world.

The victims of Southern slavery were often happy; had usually adequate food for their health, and shelter sufficient for a mild climate. The Southerners could say with some justification that when the mass of their field hands were compared with the worst class of laborers in the slums of New York and Philadelphia, and the factory towns of New England, the black slaves were as well off and in some particulars better off. Slaves lived largely in the country where health conditions were better; they worked in the open air, and their hours were about the current hours for peasants throughout Europe. They received no formal education, and neither did the Irish peasant, the English factory-laborer, nor the German *Bauer*; and in contrast with these free white laborers, the Negroes were protected by a certain primitive sort of old-age pension, job insurance, and sickness insurance; that is, they must be supported in some fashion, when they were too old to work; they must have attention in sickness, for they represented invested capital; and they could never be among the unemployed.

On the other hand, it is just as true that Negro slaves in America represented the worst and lowest conditions among modern laborers. One estimate is that the maintenance of a slave in the South cost the master about \$19 a year, which means that they were among the poorest paid laborers in the modern world. They represented in a very real sense the ultimate degradation of man. Indeed, the system was so re-

actionary, so utterly inconsistent with modern progress, that we simply cannot grasp it today. No matter how degraded the factory hand, he is not real estate. The tragedy of the black slave's position was precisely this; his absolute subjection to the individual will of an owner and to "the cruelty and injustice which are the invariable consequences of the exercise of irresponsible power, especially where authority must be sometimes delegated by the planter to agents of inferior education and coarser feelings."

The proof of this lies clearly written in the slave codes. Slaves were not considered men. They had no right of petition. They were "devisable like any other chattel." They could own nothing; they could make no contracts; they could hold no property, nor traffic in property; they could not hire out; they could not legally marry nor constitute families; they could not control their children; they could not appeal from their master; they could be punished at will. They could not testify in court; they could be imprisoned by their owners, and the criminal offense of assault and battery could not be committed on the person of a slave. The "willful, malicious and deliberate murder" of a slave was punishable by death, but such a crime was practically impossible of proof. The slave owed to his master and all his family a respect "without bounds, and an absolute obedience." This authority could be transmitted to others. A slave could not sue his master; had no right of redemption; no right to education or religion; a promise made to a slave by his master had no force nor validity. Children followed the condition of the slave mother. The slave could have no access to the judiciary. A slave might be condemned to death for striking any white person.

Looking at these accounts, "it is safe to say that the law regards a Negro slave, so far as his civil status is concerned, purely and absolutely property, to be bought and sold and pass and descend as a tract of land, a horse, or an ox."<sup>1</sup>

The whole legal status of slavery was enunciated in the extraordinary statement of a Chief Justice of the United States that Negroes had always been regarded in America "as having no rights which a white man was bound to respect."

It may be said with truth that the law was often harsher than the practice. Nevertheless, these laws and decisions represent the legally permissible possibilities, and the only curb upon the power of the master was his sense of humanity and decency, on the one hand, and the conserving of his investment on the other. Of the humanity of large numbers of Southern masters there can be no doubt. In some cases, they gave their slaves a fatherly care. And yet even in such cases the strain upon their ability to care for large numbers of people and

the necessity of entrusting the care of the slaves to other hands than their own, led to much suffering and cruelty.

The matter of his investment in land and slaves greatly curtailed the owner's freedom of action. Under the competition of growing industrial organization, the slave system was indeed the source of immense profits. But for the slave owner and landlord to keep a large or even reasonable share of these profits was increasingly difficult. The price of the slave produce in the open market could be hammered down by merchants and traders acting with knowledge and collusion. And the slave owner was, therefore, continually forced to find his profit not in the high price of cotton and sugar, but in beating even further down the cost of his slave labor. This made the slave owners in early days kill the slave by overwork and renew their working stock; it led to the widely organized interstate slave trade between the Border States and the Cotton Kingdom of the Southern South; it led to neglect and the breaking up of families, and it could not protect the slave against the cruelty, lust and neglect of certain owners.

Thus human slavery in the South pointed and led in two singularly contradictory and paradoxical directions—toward the deliberate commercial breeding and sale of human labor for profit and toward the intermingling of black and white blood. The slaveholders shrank from acknowledging either set of facts but they were clear and undeniable.

In this vital respect, the slave laborer differed from all others of his day; he could be sold; he could, at the will of a single individual, be transferred for life a thousand miles or more. His family, wife and children could be legally and absolutely taken from him. Free laborers today are compelled to wander in search for work and food; their families are deserted for want of wages; but in all this there is no such direct barter in human flesh. It was a sharp accentuation of control over men beyond the modern labor reserve or the contract coolie system.

Negroes could be sold—actually sold as we sell cattle with no reference to calves or bulls, or recognition of family. It was a nasty business. The white South was properly ashamed of it and continually belittled and almost denied it. But it was a stark and bitter fact. Southern papers of the Border States were filled with advertisements:—"I wish to purchase fifty Negroes of both sexes from 6 to 30 years of age for which I will give the highest cash prices."

"Wanted to purchase—Negroes of every description, age and sex."

The consequent disruption of families is proven beyond doubt:

"Fifty Dollars reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, a Negro

girl, named Maria. She is of a copper color, between 13 and 14 years of age—bareheaded and barefooted. She is small for her age—very sprightly and very likely. She stated she was *going to see her mother* at Maysville. Sanford Tomson."

"Committed to jail of Madison County, a Negro woman, who calls her name Fanny, and says she belongs to William Miller, of Mobile. She formerly belonged to John Givins, of this county, who now owns *several of her children*. David Shropshire, Jailer."

"Fifty Dollar reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, his Negro man Pauladore, commonly called Paul. I understand Gen. R. Y. Hayne *has purchased his wife and children* from H. L. Pinckney, Esq., and has them on his plantation at Goosecreek, where, no doubt, the fellow is frequently *lurking*. T. Davis." One can see Pauladore "lurking" about his wife and children."

The system of slavery demanded a special police force and such a force was made possible and unusually effective by the presence of the poor whites. This explains the difference between the slave revolts in the West Indies, and the lack of effective revolt in the Southern United States. In the West Indies, the power over the slave was held by the whites and carried out by them and such Negroes as they could trust. In the South, on the other hand, the great planters formed proportionately quite as small a class but they had singularly enough at their command some five million poor whites; that is, there were actually more white people to police the slaves than there were slaves. Considering the economic rivalry of the black and white worker in the North, it would have seemed natural that the poor white would have refused to police the slaves. But two considerations led him in the opposite direction. First of all, it gave him work and some authority as overseer, slave driver, and member of the patrol system. But above and beyond this, it fed his vanity because it associated him with the masters. Slavery bred in the poor white a dislike of Negro toil of all sorts. He never regarded himself as a laborer, or as part of any planter and to own "niggers." To these Negroes he transferred all the dislike and hatred which he had for the whole slave system. The result was that the system was held stable and intact by the poor white. Even with the late ruin of Haiti before their eyes, the planters, stirred as they were, were nevertheless able to stamp out slave revolt. The dozen revolts of the eighteenth century had dwindled to the plot of Gabriel in 1800, Vesey in 1822, of Nat Turner in 1831 and crews of the *Amistad* and *Creole* in 1839 and 1841. Gradually the whole white South became an armed and commissioned camp to keep Negroes in slavery and to kill the black rebel.

But even the poor white, led by the planter, would not have kept the black slave in nearly so complete control had it not been for what may be called the Safety Valve of Slavery; and that was the chance which a vigorous and determined slave had to run away to freedom.

Under the situation as it developed between 1830 and 1860 there were grave losses to the capital invested in black workers. Encouraged by the idealism of those Northern thinkers who insisted that Negroes were human, the black worker sought freedom by running away from slavery. The physical geography of America with its paths north, by swamp, river and mountain range; the daring of black revolutionists like Henson and Tubman; and the extra-legal efforts of abolitionists made this more and more easy.

One cannot know the real facts concerning the number of fugitives, but despite the fear of advertising the losses, the emphasis put upon fugitive slaves by the South shows that it was an important economic item. It is certain from the bitter effort to increase the efficiency of the fugitive slave law that the losses from runaways were widespread and continuous; and the increase in the interstate slave trade from Border States to the deep South, together with the increase in the price of slaves, showed a growing pressure. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, one bought an average slave for \$200; while in 1860 the price ranged from \$1,400 to \$2,000.

Not only was the fugitive slave important because of the actual loss involved, but for potentialities in the future. These free Negroes were furnishing a leadership for the mass of the black workers, and especially they were furnishing a text for the abolition idealists. Fugitive slaves, like Frederick Douglass and others humbler and less gifted, increased the number of abolitionists by thousands and spelled the doom of slavery.

The true significance of slavery in the United States to the whole social development of America lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy. What were to be the limits of democratic control in the United States? If all labor, black as well as white, became free—were given schools and the right to vote—what control could or should be set to the power and action of these laborers? Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship and control; and how would property and privilege be protected? This was the great and primary question which was in the minds of the men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of democracy expands and touches all races and nations.



And of all human development, ancient and modern, not the least singular and significant is the philosophy of life and action which slavery bred in the souls of black folk. In most respects its expression was stilted and confused; the rolling periods of Hebrew prophecy and biblical legend furnished inaccurate but splendid words. The subtle folk-lore of Africa, with whimsy and parable, veiled wish and wisdom; and above all fell the anointing chrism of the slave music, the only gift of pure art in America.

Beneath the Veil lay right and wrong, vengeance and love, and sometimes throwing aside the veil, a soul of sweet Beauty and Truth stood revealed. Nothing else of art or religion did the slave South give to the world, except the Negro song and story. And even after slavery, down to our day, it has added but little to this gift. One has but to remember as symbol of it all, still unspoiled by petty artisans, the legend of John Henry, the mighty black, who broke his heart working against the machine, and died "with his Hammer in His Hand."

Up from this slavery gradually climbed the Free Negro with clearer, modern expression and more definite aim long before the emancipation of 1863. His greatest effort lay in his cooperation with the Abolition movement. He knew he was not free until all Negroes were free. Individual Negroes became exhibits of the possibilities of the Negro race, if once it was raised above the status of slavery. Even when, as so often, the Negro became Court Jester to the ignorant American mob, he made his plea in his songs and antics.

Thus spoke "the noblest slave that ever God set free," Frederick Douglass in 1857, in his 4th of July oration at Rochester, voicing the frank and fearless criticism of the black worker:

"What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. . . .

"You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation (as embodied in the two great political parties) is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three millions of your countrymen. You hurl your anathemas at the crown-headed tyrants

of Russia and Austria and pride yourselves on your democratic institutions, while you yourselves consent to be the mere *tools* and *body-guards* of the tyrants of Virginia and Carolina. You invite to your shores fugitives of oppression from abroad, honor them with banquets, greet them with ovations, cheer them, toast them, salute them, protect them, and pour out your money to them like water; but the fugitives from your own land you advertise, hunt, arrest, shoot, and kill. You glory in your refinement and your universal education; yet you maintain a system as barbarous and dreadful as ever stained the character of a nation—a system begun in avarice, supported in pride, and perpetuated in cruelty. You shed tears over fallen Hungary, and make the sad story of her wrongs the theme of your poets, statesmen, and orators, till your gallant sons are ready to fly to arms to vindicate her cause against the oppressor; but, in regard to the ten thousand wrongs of the American slave, you would enforce the strictest silence, and would hail him as an enemy of the nation who dares to make those wrongs the subject of public discourse!"

Above all, we must remember the black worker was the ultimate exploited; that he formed that mass of labor which had neither wish nor power to escape from the labor status, in order to directly exploit other laborers, or indirectly, by alliance with capital, to share in their exploitation. To be sure, the black mass, developed again and again, here and there, capitalistic groups in New Orleans, in Charleston and in Philadelphia; groups willing to join white capital in exploiting labor; but they were driven back into the mass by racial prejudice before they had reached a permanent foothold; and thus became all the more bitter against all organization which by means of race prejudice, or the monopoly of wealth, sought to exclude men from making a living.

It was thus the black worker, as founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world, who brought civil war in America. He was its underlying cause, in spite of every effort to base the strife upon union and national power.

That dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States—that great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny; it is despised and rejected by race and color; paid a wage below the level of decent living; driven, beaten, prisoned and enslaved in all but name; spawning the world's raw material and luxury—cotton, wool, coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil, fibers, spices, rubber, silks, lumber, copper, gold, diamonds, leather—how shall we end the list and where? All these are gathered up at

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prices lowest of the low, manufactured, transported and at fabulous gain; and the resultant wealth is distributed and displayed and made the basis of world power and universal dominion and armed arrogance in London and Paris, Berlin and Rome, New York and Rio de Janeiro.

Here is the real modern labor problem. Here is the kernel of the problem of Religion and Democracy, of Humanity. Words and futile gestures avail nothing. Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.

Dark, shackled knights of labor, clinging still  
Amidst a universal wreck of faith

To cheerfulness, and foreigners to hate.

These know ye not, these have ye not received,

But these shall speak to you Beatitudes.

Around them surge the tides of all your strife,

Above them rise the august monuments

Of all your outward splendor, but they stand

Unenvious in thought, and bide their time.

LESLIE P. HILL

1. Compare A. E. McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America*, p. 137.
2. *A Picture of Slavery Drawn from the Decisions of Southern Courts*, p. 5.
3. Compare Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South*; Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*.
4. Woodson, *Negro Orators and Their Orations*, pp. 218-19.

## II. THE WHITE WORKER

How America became the laborer's Promised Land; and flocking here from all the world the white workers competed with black slaves, with new floods of foreigners, and with growing exploitation, until they fought slavery to save democracy and then lost democracy in a new and vaster slavery

The opportunity for real and new democracy in America was broad. Political power was at first as usual confined to property holders and an aristocracy of birth and learning. But it was never securely based on land. Land was free and both land and property were possible to nearly every thrifty worker. Schools began early to multiply and open their doors even to the poor laborer. Birth began to count for less and less and America became to the world a land of opportunity. So the world came to America, even before the Revolution, and afterward during the nineteenth century, nineteen million immigrants entered the United States.

The new labor that came to the United States, while it was poor, used to oppression and accustomed to a low standard of living, was not willing, after it reached America, to regard itself as a permanent laboring class and it is in the light of this fact that the labor movement among white Americans must be studied. The successful, well-paid American laboring class formed, because of its property and ideals, a petty bourgeoisie ready always to join capital in exploiting common labor, white and black, foreign and native. The more energetic and thrifty among the immigrants caught the prevalent American idea that here labor could become emancipated from the necessity of continuous toil and that an increasing proportion could join the class of exploiters, that is of those who made their income chiefly by profit derived through the hiring of labor.

Abraham Lincoln expressed this idea frankly at Hartford, in March, 1860. He said:

"I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flat boat—just what might happen to any poor man's son." Then followed the characteristic philosophy of the time: "I want every man to have his chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this



year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him. That is the true system."

He was enunciating the widespread American idea of the son rising to a higher economic level than the father; of the chance for the poor man to accumulate wealth and power, which made the European doctrine of a working class fighting for the elevation of all workers seem not only less desirable but even less possible for average workers than they had formerly considered it.

These workers came to oppose slavery not so much from moral as from the economic fear of being reduced by competition to the level of slaves. They wanted a chance to become capitalists; and they found that chance threatened by the competition of a working class whose status at the bottom of the economic structure seemed permanent and inescapable. At first, black slavery jarred upon them, and as early as the seventeenth century German immigrants to Pennsylvania asked the Quakers innocently if slavery was in accord with the Golden Rule. Then, gradually, as succeeding immigrants were thrown in difficult and exasperating competition with black workers, their attitude changed. These were the very years when the white worker was beginning to understand the early American doctrine of wealth and property; to escape the liability of imprisonment for debt, and even to gain the right of universal suffrage. He found pouring into cities like New York and Philadelphia emancipated Negroes with low standards of living, competing for the jobs which the lower class of unskilled white laborers wanted.

For the immediate available jobs, the Irish particularly competed and the employers because of race antipathy and sympathy with the South did not wish to increase the number of Negro workers, so long as the foreigners worked just as cheaply. The foreigners in turn blamed blacks for the cheap price of labor. The result was race war; riots took place which were at first simply the flaming hostility of groups of laborers fighting for bread and butter; then they turned into race riots. For three days in Cincinnati in 1829, a mob of whites wounded and killed free Negroes and fugitive slaves and destroyed property. Most of the black population, numbering over two thousand, left the city and trekked to Canada. In Philadelphia, 1828-1840, a series of riots took place which thereafter extended until after the Civil War. The riot of 1834 took the dimensions of a pitched battle and lasted for three days. Thirty-one houses and two churches were destroyed. Other riots took place in 1835 and 1838 and a two days' riot in 1842 caused the calling out of the militia with artillery.

In the forties came quite a different class, the English and German workers, who had tried by organization to fight the machine and in

the end had to some degree envisaged the Marxian reorganization of industry through trade unions and class struggle. The attitude of these people toward the Negro was varied and contradictory. At first they blurted out their disapprobation of slavery on principle. It was a phase of all wage slavery. Then they began to see a way out for the worker in America through the free land of the West. Here was a solution such as was impossible in Europe: plenty of land, rich land, land coming daily nearer its own markets, to which the worker could retreat and restore the industrial balance ruined in Europe by the expropriation of the worker from the soil. Or in other words, the worker in America saw a chance to increase his wage and regulate his conditions of employment much greater than in Europe. The trade unions could have a material backing that they could not have in Germany, France or England. This thought, curiously enough, instead of increasing the sympathy for the slave turned it directly into rivalry and enmity.

The wisest of the leaders could not clearly envisage just how slave labor in conjunction and competition with free labor tended to reduce all labor toward slavery. For this reason, the union and labor leaders gravitated toward the political party which opposed tariff bounties and welcomed immigrants, quite forgetting that this same Democratic party had as its backbone the planter oligarchy of the South with its slave labor.

The new immigrants in their competition with this group reflected not simply the general attitude of America toward colored people, but particularly they felt a threat of slave competition which these Negroes foreshadowed. The Negroes worked cheaply, partly from custom, partly as their only defense against competition. The white laborers realized that Negroes were part of a group of millions of workers who were slaves by law, and whose competition kept white labor out of the work of the South and threatened its wages and stability in the North. When now the labor question moved West, and became a part of the land question, the competition of black men became of increased importance. Foreign laborers saw more clearly than most Americans the tremendous significance of free land in abundance, such as America possessed, in open contrast to the land monopoly of Europe. But here on this free land, they met not only a few free Negro workers, but the threat of a mass of slaves. The attitude of the West toward Negroes, therefore, became sterner than that of the East. Here was the possibility of direct competition with slaves, and the absorption of Western land into the slave system. This must be resisted at all costs, but beyond this, even free Negroes must be discouraged. On this the Southern poor white immigrants insisted.

In the meantime, the problem of the black worker had not ceased

to trouble the conscience and the economic philosophy of America. That the worker should be a bond slave was fundamentally at variance with the American doctrine, and the demand for the abolition of slavery had been continuous since the Revolution. In the North, it had resulted in freeing gradually all of the Negroes. But the comparatively small number of those thus freed was being augmented now by fugitive slaves from the South, and manifestly the ultimate plight of the black worker depended upon the course of Southern slavery. There arose, then, in the thirties, and among thinkers and workers, a demand that slavery in the United States be immediately abolished.

This demand became epitomized in the crusade of William Lloyd Garrison, himself a poor printer, but a man of education, thought and indomitable courage. This movement was not primarily a labor movement or a matter of profit and wage. It simply said that under any condition of life, the reduction of a human being to real estate was a crime against humanity of such enormity that its existence must be immediately ended. After emancipation there would come questions of labor, wage and political power. But now, first, must be demanded that ordinary human freedom and recognition of essential manhood which slavery blasphemously denied. This philosophy of freedom was a logical continuation of the freedom philosophy of the eighteenth century which insisted that Freedom was not an End but an indispensable means to the beginning of human progress and that democracy could function only after the dropping of feudal privileges, monopoly and chains.

The propaganda which made the abolition movement terribly real was the Fugitive Slave—the piece of intelligent humanity who could say: I have been owned like an ox. I stole my own body and now I am hunted by law and lash to be made an ox again. By no conception of justice could such logic be answered. Nevertheless, at the same time white labor, while it attempted no denial but even expressed faint sympathy, saw in this fugitive slave and in the millions of slaves behind him, willing and eager to work for less than current wage, competition for their own jobs. What they failed to comprehend was that the black man enslaved was an even more formidable and fatal competitor than the black man free.

Here, then, were two labor movements: the movement to give the black worker a minimum legal status which would enable him to sell his own labor, and another movement which proposed to increase the wage and better the condition of the working class in America, now largely composed of foreign immigrants, and dispute with the new American capitalism the basis upon which the new wealth was to be divided. Broad philanthropy and a wide knowledge of the ele-

ments of human progress would have led these two movements to unite and in their union to become irresistible. It was difficult, almost impossible, for this to be clear to the white labor leaders of the thirties. They had their particularistic grievances and one of these was the competition of free Negro labor. Beyond this they could easily envision a new and tremendous competition of black workers after all the slaves became free. What they did not see nor understand was that this competition was present and would continue and would be emphasized if the Negro continued as a slave worker. On the other hand, the Abolitionists did not realize the plight of the white laborer, especially the semi-skilled and unskilled worker.

While the Evans brothers, who came as labor agitators in 1835, had among their twelve demands "the abolition of chattel slavery," nevertheless, George was soon convinced that freedom without land was of no importance. He wrote to Gerrit Smith, who was giving land to Negroes, and said:

"I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was *white* slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see, clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless *white* would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surety of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favorable climate. If the Southern form of slavery existed at the North, I should say the black would be a great loser by such a change."

At the convention of the New England anti-slavery society in 1845, Robert Owen, the great champion of cooperation, said he was opposed to Negro slavery, but that he had seen worse slavery in England than among the Negroes. Horace Greeley said the same year: "If I am less troubled concerning the slavery prevalent in Charleston or New Orleans, it is because I see so much slavery in New York which appears to claim my first efforts."

Thus despite all influences, reform and social uplift veered away from the Negro. Brisbane, Channing, Owen and other leaders called a National Reform Association to meet in New York in May, 1845. In October, Owen's "World Conference" met. But they hardly mentioned slavery. The Abolitionists did join a National Industrial Congress which met around 1845-1846. Other labor leaders were openly hostile toward the abolitionist movement, while the movement for free land increased.

Thus two movements—Labor-Free Soil, and Abolition, exhibited fundamental divergence instead of becoming one great party of free

labor and free land. The Free Soilers stressed the difficulties of even the free laborer getting hold of the land and getting work in the great congestion which immigration had brought; and the abolitionists stressed the moral wrong of slavery. These two movements might easily have cooperated and differed only in matters of emphasis; but the trouble was that black and white laborers were competing for the same jobs just of course as all laborers always are. The immediate competition became open and visible because of racial lines and racial philosophy and particularly in Northern states where free Negroes and fugitive slaves had established themselves as workers, while the ultimate and overshadowing competition of free and slave labor was obscured and pushed into the background. This situation, too, made extraordinary reaction, led by the ignorant mob and fomented by authority and privilege; abolitionists were attacked and their meeting places burned; women suffragists were hooted; laws were proposed making the kidnapping of Negroes easier and disfranchising Negro voters in conventions called for purposes of "reform."

The humanitarian reform movement reached its height in 1847-1849 amid falling prices, and trade unionism was at a low ebb. The strikes from 1849-1852 won the support of Horace Greeley, and increased the labor organizations. Labor in eastern cities refused to touch the slavery controversy, and the control which the Democrats had over the labor vote in New York and elsewhere increased this tendency to ignore the Negro, and increased the division between white and colored labor. In 1850, a Congress of Trade Unions was held with 110 delegates. They stressed land reform but said nothing about slavery and the organization eventually was captured by Tammany Hall. After 1850 unions composed of skilled laborers began to separate from common laborers and adopt a policy of closed shops and a minimum wage and excluded farmers and Negroes. Although this movement was killed by the panic of 1857, it eventually became triumphant in the eighties and culminated in the American Federation of Labor which today allows any local or national union to exclude Negroes on any pretext.

Other labor leaders became more explicit and emphasized race rather than class. John Campbell said in 1851: "Will the white race ever agree that blacks shall stand beside us on election day, upon the rostrum, in the ranks of the army, in our places of amusement, in places of public worship, ride in the same coaches, railway cars, or steamships? Never! Never! or is it natural, or just, that this kind of equality should exist? God never intended it; had he so willed it, he would have made all one color."<sup>2</sup>

New labor leaders arrived in the fifties. Hermann Kriege and Wil-

helm Weitling left their work in Germany, and their friends Marx and Engels, and came to America, and at the same time came tens of thousands of revolutionary Germans. The Socialist and Communist papers increased. Trade unions increased in power and numbers and held public meetings. Immediately, the question of slavery injected itself, and that of abolition.

Kriege began to preach land reform and free soil in 1846, and by 1850 six hundred American papers were supporting his program. But Kriege went beyond Evans and former leaders and openly repudiated abolition. He declared in 1846:

"That we see in the slavery question a property question which cannot be settled by itself alone. That we should declare ourselves in favor of the abolitionist movement if it were our intention to throw the Republic into a state of anarchy, to extend the competition of 'free workmen' beyond all measure, and to depress labor itself to the last extremity. That we could not improve the lot of our 'black brothers' by abolition under the conditions prevailing in modern society, but make infinitely worse the lot of our 'white brothers.' That we believe in the peaceable development of society in the United States and do not, therefore, here at least see our only hope in condition of the extremest degradation. That we feel constrained, therefore, to oppose Abolition with all our might, despite all the importunities of sentimental philistines and despite all the poetical effusions of liberty-intoxicated ladies."<sup>3</sup>

Wilhelm Weitling, who came to America the following year, 1847, started much agitation but gave little attention to slavery. He did not openly side with the slaveholder, as Kriege did; nevertheless, there was no condemnation of slavery in his paper. In the first German labor conference in Philadelphia, under Weitling in 1850, a series of resolutions were passed which did not mention slavery. Both Kriege and Weitling joined the Democratic party and numbers of other immigrant Germans did the same thing, and these workers, therefore, became practical defenders of slavery. Doubtless, the "Know-Nothing" movement against the foreign-born forced many workers into the Democratic party, despite slavery.

The year 1853 saw the formation of the Arbeiterbund, under Joseph Weydemeyer, a friend of Karl Marx. This organization advocated Marxian socialism but never got a clear attitude toward slavery. In 1854, it opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill because "Capitalism and land speculation have again been favored at the expense of the mass of the people," and "This bill withdraws from or makes unavailable in a future homestead bill vast tracts of territory," and "authorizes the further extension of slavery; but we have, do now, and shall con-

tinue to protest most emphatically against both white and black slavery."

Nevertheless, when the Arbeiterbund was reorganized in December, 1857, slavery was not mentioned. When its new organ appeared in April, 1858, it said that the question of the present moment was not the abolition of slavery, but the prevention of its further extension and that Negro slavery was firmly rooted in America. One small division of this organization in 1857 called for abolition of the slave trade and colonization of Negroes, but defended the Southern slaveholders.

In 1859, however, a conference of the Arbeiterbund condemned all slavery in whatever form it might appear, and demanded the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Democratic and pro-slavery New York *Staats-Zeitung* counseled the people to abstain from agitation against the extension of slavery, but all of the German population did not agree.

As the Chartist movement increased in England, the press was filled with attacks against the United States and its institutions, and the Chartists were clear on the matter of slavery. Their chief organ in 1844 said: "That damning stain upon the American escutcheon is one that has caused the Republicans of Europe to weep for very shame and mortification; and the people of the United States have much to answer for at the bar of humanity for this indecent, cruel, revolting and fiendish violation of their boasted principle—that 'All men are born free and equal.'"

The labor movement in England continued to emphasize the importance of attacking slavery; and the agitation, started by the work of Frederick Douglass and others, increased in importance and activity. In 1857, George I. Holyoake sent an anti-slavery address to America, signed by 1,800 English workmen, whom Karl Marx himself was guiding in England, and this made the black American worker a central text. They pointed out the fact that the black worker was furnishing the raw material which the English capitalist was exploiting together with the English worker. This same year, the United States Supreme Court sent down the Dred Scott decision that Negroes were not citizens.

This English initiative had at first but limited influence in America. The trade unions were willing to admit that the Negroes ought to be free sometime; but at the present, self-preservation called for their slavery; and after all, whites were a different grade of workers from blacks. Even when the Marxian ideas arrived, there was a split; the earlier representatives of the Marxian philosophy in America agreed with the older Union movement in deprecating any entanglement

with the abolition controversy. After all, abolition represented capital. The whole movement was based on mawkish sentimentality, and not on the demands of the workers, at least of the white workers. And so the early American Marxists simply gave up the idea of intruding the black worker into the socialist commonwealth at that time.

To this logic the abolitionists were increasingly opposed. It seemed to them that the crucial point was the matter of freedom; that a free laborer in America had an even chance to make his fortune as a worker or a farmer; but, on the other hand, if the laborer was not free, as in the case of the Negro, he had no opportunity, and he inevitably degraded white labor. The abolitionist did not sense the new subordination into which the worker was being forced by organized capital, while the laborers did not realize that the exclusion of four million workers from the labor program was a fatal omission. Wendell Phillips alone suggested a boycott on Southern goods, and said that the great cause of labor was paramount and included mill operatives in New England, peasants in Ireland, and laborers in South America who ought not to be lost sight of in sympathy for the Southern slave.

In the United States shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War there were twenty-six trades with national organizations, including the iron and steel workers, machinists, blacksmiths, etc. The employers formed a national league and planned to import more workmen from foreign countries. The iron molders started a national strike July 5, 1859, and said: "Wealth is power, and practical experience teaches us that it is a power but too often used to oppress and degrade the daily laborer. Year after year the capital of the country becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of a few, and, in proportion as the wealth of the country becomes centralized, its power increases, and the laboring classes are impoverished. It therefore becomes us, as men who have to battle with the stern realities of life, to look this matter fair in the face; there is no dodging the question; let every man give it a fair, full and candid consideration, and then act according to his honest convictions. *What position are we, the mechanics of America, to hold in Society?*"

There was not a word in this address about slavery and one would not dream that the United States was on the verge of the greatest labor revolution it had seen. Other conferences of the molders, machinists and blacksmiths and others were held in the sixties, and a labor mass meeting at Faneuil Hall in Boston in 1861 said: "The truth is that the workmen care little for the strife of political parties and the intrigues of office-seekers. We regard them with the contempt they deserve. We are weary of this question of slavery; it is a matter which does not concern us; and we wish only to attend to our business,

woman, a younger woman with a mass of tangled red hair hanging about her shoulders, indubitably suckling a baby; a little girl with the same auburn evidence of Scotch ancestry; a boy, and a younger child all gathered about a fire made among some bricks, surrounding a couple of iron saucepans, in which is a dirty mixture looking like mud, but probably warmed-up sorghum syrup, which with a few pieces of corn pone, makes their breakfast.

"Most of them are illiterate and more than correspondingly ignorant. Some of them had Indian ancestors and a few bear evidences of Negro blood. The so-called 'mountain boomer,' says an observer, 'has little self-respect and no self-reliance. . . . So long as his corn pile lasts the "cracker" lives in contentment, feasting on a sort of hoe cake made of grated corn meal mixed with salt and water and baked before the hot coals, with addition of what game the forest furnishes him when he can get up the energy to go out and shoot or trap it. . . . The irregularities of their moral lives cause them no sense of shame. . . . But, notwithstanding these low moral conceptions, they are of an intense religious excitability.'"<sup>8</sup>

Above this lowest mass rose a middle class of poor whites in the making. There were some small farmers who had more than a mere sustenance and yet were not large planters. There were overseers. There was a growing class of merchants who traded with the slaves and free Negroes and became in many cases larger traders, dealing with the planters for the staple crops. Some poor whites rose to the professional class, so that the rift between the planters and the mass of the whites was partially bridged by this smaller intermediate class.

While revolt against the domination of the planters over the poor whites was voiced by men like Helper, who called for a class struggle to destroy the planters, this was nullified by deep-rooted antagonism to the Negro, whether slave or free. If black labor could be expelled from the United States or eventually exterminated, then the fight against the planter could take place. But the poor whites and their leaders could not for a moment contemplate a fight of united white and black labor against the exploiters. Indeed, the natural leaders of the poor whites, the small farmer, the merchant, the professional man, the white mechanic and slave overseer, were bound to the planters and repelled from the slaves and even from the mass of the white laborers in two ways: first, they constituted the police patrol who could ride with planters and now and then exercise unlimited force upon recalcitrant or runaway slaves; and then, too, there was always a chance that they themselves might also become planters by saving money, by investment, by the power of good luck; and the only heaven that attracted them was the life of the great Southern planter.

and leave the South to attend to their own affairs, without any interference from the North."<sup>4</sup>

In all this consideration, we have so far ignored the white workers of the South and we have done this because the labor movement ignored them and the abolitionists ignored them; and above all, they were ignored by Northern capitalists and Southern planters. They were in many respects almost a forgotten mass of men. Cairnes describes the slave South, the period just before the war:

"It resolves itself into three classes, broadly distinguished from each other, and connected by no common interest—the slaves on whom devolves all the regular industry, the slaveholders who reap all its fruits, and an idle and lawless rabble who live dispersed over vast plains in a condition little removed from absolute barbarism."

From all that has been written and said about the ante-bellum South, one almost loses sight of about 5,000,000 white people in 1860 who lived in the South and held no slaves. Even among the two million slaveholders, an oligarchy of 8,000 really ruled the South, while as an observer said: "For twenty years, I do not recollect ever to have seen or heard these non-slaveholding whites referred to by the Southern gentleman as constituting any part of what they called the South."<sup>5</sup> They were largely ignorant and degraded; only 25% could read and write.

The condition of the poor whites has been many times described: "A wretched log hut or two are the only habitations in sight. Here reside, or rather take shelter, the miserable cultivators of the ground, or a still more destitute class who make a precarious living by peddling "lightwood" in the city. . . ."

"These cabins . . . are dens of filth. The bed if there be a bed is a layer of something in the corner that defies scenting. If the bed is nasty, what of the floor? What of the whole enclosed space? What of the creatures themselves? Pough! Water in use as a purifier is unknown. Their faces are bedaubed with the muddy accumulation of weeks. They just give them a wipe when they see a stranger to take off the blackest dirt. . . . The poor wretches seem startled when you address them, and answer your questions covering like culprits."<sup>6</sup>

Olmsted said: "I saw as much close packing, filth and squalor, in certain blocks inhabited by laboring whites in Charleston, as I have witnessed in any Northern town of its size; and greater evidences of brutality and ruffianly character, than I have ever happened to see, among an equal population of this class, before."<sup>7</sup>

Two classes of poor whites have been differentiated: the mountain whites and the poor whites of the lowlands. "Below a dirty and ill-favored house, down under the bank on the shingle near the river, sits a family of five people, all ill-clothed and unclean; a bleary-eyed old

There were a few weak associations of white mechanics, such as printers and shipwrights and iron molders, in 1850-1860, but practically no labor movement in the South.

Charles Nordhoff states that he was told by a wealthy Alabamian, in 1860, that the planters in his region were determined to discontinue altogether the employment of free mechanics. "On my own place," he said, "I have slave carpenters, slave blacksmiths, and slave wheelwrights, and thus I am independent of free mechanics." And a certain Alfred E. Mathews remarks: "I have seen free white mechanics obliged to stand aside while their families were suffering for the necessities of life, when the slave mechanics, owned by rich and influential men, could get plenty of work; and I have heard these same white mechanics breathe the most bitter curses against the institution of slavery and the slave aristocracy."

The resultant revolt of the poor whites, just as the revolt of the slaves, came through migration. And their migration, instead of being restricted, was freely encouraged. As a result, the poor whites left the South in large numbers. In 1860, 399,700 Virginians were living out of their native state. From Tennessee, 344,765 emigrated; from North Carolina, 272,606, and from South Carolina, 256,868. The majority of these had come to the Middle West and it is quite possible that the Southern states sent as many settlers to the West as the Northeastern states, and while the Northeast demanded free soil, the Southerners demanded not only free soil but the exclusion of Negroes from work and the franchise. They had a very vivid fear of the Negro as a competitor in labor, whether slave or free.

It was thus the presence of the poor white Southerner in the West that complicated the whole Free Soil movement in its relation to the labor movement. While the Western pioneer was an advocate of extreme democracy and equalitarianism in his political and economic philosophy, his vote and influence did not go to strengthen the abolition-democracy, before, during, or even after the war. On the contrary, it was stopped and inhibited by the doctrine of race, and the West, therefore, long stood against that democracy in industry which might have emancipated labor in the United States, because it did not admit to that democracy the American citizen of Negro descent.

Thus Northern workers were organizing and fighting industrial integration in order to gain higher wage and shorter hours, and more and more they saw economic salvation in the rich land of the West. A Western movement of white workers and pioneers began and was paralleled by a Western movement of planters and black workers in the South. Land and more land became the cry of the Southern political leader, with finally a growing demand for reopening of the African

slave trade. Land, more land, became the cry of the peasant farmer in the North. The two forces met in Kansas, and in Kansas civil war began.

The South was fighting for the protection and expansion of its agrarian feudalism. For the sheer existence of slavery, there must be a continual supply of fertile land, cheaper slaves, and such political power as would give the slave status full legal recognition and protection, and annihilate the free Negro. The Louisiana Purchase had furnished slaves and land, but most of the land was in the Northwest. The foray into Mexico had opened an empire, but the availability of this land was partly spoiled by the loss of California to free labor. This suggested a proposed expansion of slavery toward Kansas, where it involved the South in competition with white labor: a competition which endangered the slave status, encouraged slave revolt, and increased the possibility of fugitive slaves.

It was a war to determine how far industry in the United States should be carried on under a system where the capitalist owns not only the nation's raw material, not only the land, but also the laborer himself; or whether the laborer was going to maintain his personal freedom, and enforce it by growing political and economic independence based on widespread ownership of land.

This brings us down to the period of the Civil War. Up to the time that the war actually broke out, American labor simply refused, in the main, to envisage black labor as a part of its problem. Right up to the edge of the war, it was talking about the emancipation of white labor and the organization of stronger unions without saying a word, or apparently giving a thought, to four million black slaves. During the war, labor was resentful. Workers were forced to fight in a strife between capitalists in which they had no interest and they showed their resentment in the peculiarly human way of beating and murdering the innocent victims of it all, the black free Negroes of New York and other Northern cities; while in the South, five million non-slaveholding poor white farmers and laborers sent their manhood by the thousands to fight and die for a system that had degraded them equally with the black slave. Could one imagine anything more paradoxical than this whole situation?

America thus stepped forward in the first blossoming of the modern age and added to the Art of Beauty, gift of the Renaissance, and to Freedom of Belief, gift of Martin Luther and Leo X, a vision of democratic self-government: the domination of political life by the intelligent decision of free and self-sustaining men. What an idea and what an era for its realization—endless land of richest fertility, natural resources such as Earth seldom exhibited before, a population



infinite in variety, of universal gift, burned in the fires of poverty and caste, yearning toward the Unknown God; and self-reliant pioneers, unafraid of man or devil. It was the Supreme Adventure, in the last Great Battle of the West, for that human freedom which would release the human spirit from lower lust for mere meat, and set it free to dream and sing.

And then some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a black man in the midst.

It transformed the world. It turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings.

But not without struggle. Not without writhing and rending of spirit and pitiable wail of lost souls. They said: Slavery was wrong but not all wrong; slavery must perish and not simply move; God made black men; God made slavery; the will of God be done; slavery to the glory of God and black men as his servants and ours; slavery as a way to freedom—the freedom of blacks, the freedom of whites; white freedom as the goal of the world and black slavery as the path thereto. Up with the white world, down with the black!

Then came this battle called Civil War, beginning in Kansas in 1854, and ending in the presidential election of 1876—twenty awful years. The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery. The whole weight of America was thrown to color caste. The colored world went down before England, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and America. A new slavery arose. The upward moving of white labor was betrayed into wars for profit based on color caste. Democracy died save in the hearts of black folk.

Indeed, the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story.

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Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,  
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?

Or what is it ye buy so dear  
With your pain and with your fear?

The seed ye sow, another reaps;  
The wealth ye find, another keeps;  
The robes ye weave, another wears;  
The arms ye forge, another bears.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1. Schlüter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery*, p. 66.
2. Campbell, *Negromania*, p. 545.
3. Schlüter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery*, pp. 72, 73.
4. Schlüter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery*, p. 135.
5. Schlüter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery*, p. 86.
6. Simkins and Woody, *South Carolina During Reconstruction*, p. 326.
7. Olmsted, *Seaboard Slave States*, p. 404.
8. Hart, *The Southern South*, pp. 34, 35.