

DOCUMENT #5

How slavery helped build a world economy

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by Howard Dodson

...The vast majority of enslaved Africans employed in plantation agriculture were field hands. Even on plantations, however, they worked in other capacities. Some were domestics and worked as butlers, waiters, maids, seamstresses, and launderers. Others were assigned as carriage drivers, hostlers, and stable boys. Artisans—carpenters, stonemasons, blacksmiths, millers, coopers, spinners, and weavers—were also employed as part of plantation labor forces.

Enslaved Africans also worked in urban areas. Upward of ten percent of the enslaved African population in the United States lived in cities. Charleston, Richmond, Savannah, Mobile, New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans all had sizable slave populations. In the southern cities they totaled approximately a third of the population.

The range of slave occupations in cities was vast. Domestic servants dominated, but there were carpenters, fishermen, coopers, draymen, sailors, masons, bricklayers, blacksmiths, bakers, tailors, peddlers, painters, and porters...

Each plantation economy was part of a larger national and international economy. The cotton plantation economy, for instance, is generally seen as part of the regional economy of the American South. By the 1830s, "cotton was king" indeed in the South. It was also king in the United States, which was competing for economic leadership in the global economy. Plantation-grown cotton was the foundation of the antebellum southern economy.

But the American financial and shipping industries were also dependent on slave-produced cotton. So was the British textile industry. Cotton was not shipped directly to Europe from the South. Rather, it was shipped to New York and then transshipped to England and other centers of cotton manufacturing in the United States and Europe.

As the cotton plantation economy expanded throughout the southern region, banks and financial houses in New York supplied the loan capital and/or investment capital to purchase land and slaves...

The value of the investments slaveholders held in their slaves was often used to secure loans to purchase additional land or slaves. Slaves were also used to pay off outstanding debts. When calculating the value of estates, the estimated value of each slave was included...

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http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/01/0131_030203_jubilee2.html