

CHAPTER 14

A VISIT TO ANTEBELLUM SOUTH CAROLINA

- A. Introduction. Antebellum South Carolina society had its roots firmly planted in the 18th century, although there were some modifications. Society was not quite as fluid as it had been during the colonial period. The elite continued to live extravagantly and the middle class were comfortable. Poor farmers, day laborers in the towns, and slaves lived a marginal existence.
- B. The Elite
1. In order to enter the ranks of the elite, a person needed wealth; however, in the 19th century how a person obtained that wealth was just as important.
 - a. Wealth obtained in trade or manufacturing was considered tainted.
 - b. Planting was the only proper vocation for a gentleman.
 2. Family ties and who were one's ancestors were more important to 19th century South Carolinians than their colonial forebears.
 3. With the spread of cotton, the plantation system, and slavery inland, South Carolina's elite expanded into the upcountry.
- C. The Middle Class
1. With the development of county seats and market towns all across the state, the numbers of the middle class grew.
 2. In a society where the planting ideal dominated, those middle class individuals who could make the transition into the ranks of the planters did so.
- D. The Artisans, Mechanics, and Laborers
1. White artisans, mechanics, and laborers became fewer in number in the post-Revolutionary years.
 2. The competition from skilled slaves and free blacks was one of the key factors in the decline of the number of white artisans, mechanics, and laborers.

E. The Independent Farmers

1. There were yeoman farmers, particularly in the upcountry, who created self-sufficient and prosperous farms.
2. Unfortunately, there were thousands of South Carolina farmers who eked out a meager existence on marginal lands.

F. The Blacks

A. 19th Century Slavery

1. The Slave Code of 1740, with some modifications, was still in force.
 - a. The codes regulated the behavior of free blacks (“free persons of color”) as well as slaves.
 - b. There were certain things that the codes did not do.
 - i. They did not prohibit free blacks from owning property, including slaves.
 - ii. They did not define, as did other states, who was a black person.
 - iii. They did not segregate any public accommodations or public places.
2. The plight of slaves on South Carolina’s plantations varied depending upon the owner.
 - a. Slaves on rice plantations worked according to the task system in which jobs were assigned to each individual who worked at his own pace.
 - b. Slaves on cotton plantations generally worked collectively in groups or gangs.
 - c. The biggest threat to South Carolina’s slave population was being sold “down South,” thus being separated from family, friends, and familiar surroundings.

B. Free Persons of Color

1. Beginning about 1750, some South Carolinians had begun to manumit (free) some of their slaves.

2. The ideology of the American Revolution led others to follow suit.
3. By the 19th century there was a small community of free blacks in Charleston and another in Columbia.
4. During the antebellum period, the General Assembly made it more difficult for an owner to free his slaves, but the practice continued.
5. Because South Carolina's had the least repressive laws concerning free blacks, free blacks from other Southern states and the West Indies migrated here in small numbers.
6. Against all odds, the Ellisons of Sumter District not only obtained their freedom, but became one of the wealthier families (white or black) in the district.
7. As the tensions between North and South increased, free blacks were harassed and they began to leave the state for Liberia, Canada, and the North.
8. Free blacks were not slaves, nor were they truly free. They did, indeed, live in "a world in shadow."

G. Religion Affected All Classes Of South Carolinians.

1. The Episcopalians
 - a. After the Revolution, former members of the Church of England formed the Episcopal Church.
 - b. Although small in numbers, it was a powerful force in the state because it was the church of the elite.
2. The Methodists
 - a. The Methodists were also an outgrowth of the old Church of England but were more evangelical and enthusiastic in their worship than Episcopalians.
 - b. They established a circuit riding ministry that carried Methodism to every corner of the state.
 - c. They were a church for all classes.

- d. Under Bishop Ellison Capers, the Methodists mounted a missionary effort to bring slaves into the church. It was controversial, but highly successful.

3. The Baptists

- a. The Baptists were one of the oldest denominations in the state; there had been Baptists in South Carolina since the 17th century.
- b. With their congregational organization and evangelical fervor, the church appealed especially to South Carolina's upcountry folk.
- c. By the Civil War, the Baptists were the largest denomination in the state.

4. The Presbyterians

- a. Like the Baptists, the Presbyterians had been in South Carolina since the 17th century.
- b. After the Revolution, it became a church preferred by the elite, especially in the upcountry.

5. The African Methodist Episcopal

- a. This denomination originated in Philadelphia in 1787 when blacks withdrew from the Methodist Church to form their own.
- b. In South Carolina, an AME Church in Charleston was chartered by the General Assembly in 1816.
 - i. In a few short years it became not only one of the largest churches in the state but also one of the largest AME churches in the country.
 - ii. Free blacks and slaves made up the Charleston church's congregation.
 - iii. In 1822, the AME church was closed.

6. All churches had some common characteristics.

- a. There were no radical barriers; blacks and whites worshipped together, although sometimes blacks had to sit in balconies.
- b. The churches supported the social and political establishment of the state.

H. Higher Education

1. For nearly a half century, the South Carolina College was the only real college in the state because the General Assembly refused to grant charters for any competing schools.
2. In 1850, the General Assembly relented and permitted the chartering of colleges operated by the various denominations.
 - a. Erskine (Associate Reformed Presbyterian) was founded in 1837, but not legally chartered until 1850.
 - b. Furman (Baptist) was founded in 1850.
 - c. Wofford (Methodist) was chartered in 1851 and had the largest endowment of any college in South Carolina.
3. Women could attend any one of a number of colleges, but it would be more appropriate to use the term “finishing school” instead of college in describing them.
 - a. Barhamville Academy, near Columbia, with its European faculty attracted young ladies from all over the South.
 - b. The denominations opened women’s colleges during the decade of the 1850s.

I. Secondary Education

1. Private schools dotted the landscape from the mountains to the sea.
 - a. These varied in quality and staying power.
 - b. The best of these schools was Moses Waddell’s Willington Academy in present day McCormick County.
2. Wealthy families still employed tutors or sent their children to England and Europe for their schooling.
3. An 1811 act of the General Assembly created 124 “public schools,” but they were poorly funded and had the stigma of being “paupers’ schools.”
4. Charleston’s School System, inaugurated in 1856 and modeled after that of New York City, was an instant success and attracted children of all classes.

5. In 1860, less than 50% of the school age children in the state attend schools of any sort.
- J. Summary. Antebellum South Carolina society was a well ordered, stable society, based upon social deference. The wealthy, educated elite controlled the state. Their power was not questioned seriously in the years prior to 1865.
- K. Readings
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 6. Hollis, University of South Carolina, pp. 3-211
 7. Horne, South Carolina, 194-205, 250-267
 7. Howe, History of the Presbyterian Church
 9. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 416-424, 432-448
 3. Johnson & Roark, Black Masters
 4. Joyner, Down By The Riverside
 10. Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, pp. 31-45
 11. Rogers, Georgetown County, pp. 304-323
 12. Rosengarten, Tombee
 13. Shipp, Methodism in South Carolina, pp. 136-216
 14. Thomas, The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, pp. 3-82
 15. Tindall, America, pp. 488-494, 547-551
 16. Townsend, South Carolina Baptists

17. Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, pp. 107-138
18. Wikramanayke, A World in Shadow