

## **Chapter Four: Slavery and the Road to Secession**

### **A. Slavery and the Cotton Kingdom:**

The revival of slavery was due to the expansion of cotton production. The rise of the textile industry in England and New England created a huge demand for cotton. At first, the only cotton grown in the United States was the variety which needed the special climatic conditions of coastal Georgia and South Carolina; the in 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton-gin, a machine capable of separating the seeds from the fibres of upland or short-staple cotton. This made all types of cotton growing practicable on almost any soil in regions with adequate rainfall.

Soon cotton production spread in the west of South Carolina and Georgia, then into the rich lands of the Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta, and finally into Texas. By 1840 or so, the Cotton Kingdom extended more than a thousand miles from east to west and spread six or seven hundred miles up the Mississippi Valley. Production rose from 3,000 bales in 1790 to 4 million in 1860. Although the South grew other crops like tobacco, sugar, and rice, it was around cotton that the economic life of the region mainly revolved. Because there were advantages in growing cotton in big, rather than small, quantities, large plantations tended to grow a number faster than small farms. Moreover, the fact that cotton agriculture required constant, though not necessarily skilled, attention, meant that slave labour was ideally suited to its cultivation.

Although the African slave trade was legally ended in 1808, the numbers of slaves in the South continued to double every thirty years, growing from 857,000 in 1800 to 4 million in 1860. Some clandestine importations continued even after 1808 but most of the slaves in the newly opened cotton states of the Southwest came not from abroad but from soil-exhausted areas of the upper south, especially Virginia and Maryland. In 1860, the slave population formed one third of total southern population. In three states, South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana, slaves exceeded the number of whites.

Southern states regulated the conditions of slaves by law. Slaves lived under a harsh and repressive system: they were forbidden to hold property, to carry firearms, to congregated with others except at church, to leave their masters' premises without permission, or to give evidence against a white man in court. In addition, they could not legally marry or be taught to read and write. Those measures were taken because of southern fears of servile insurrection.

Slave life differed from one region to another, from one crop to another, from one character of the individual master to another. Growing rice in the unhealthy swamps of coastal South Carolina and Georgia was more arduous than raising cotton. Slaves in small plantations were more humanely treated than those in large ones.

Despite their harsh conditions, slaves succeeded to maintain an autonomous culture, allowing them to escaped complete domination by the white master class. Folktales, oral traditions, dances, spirituals, religion, family ties, showing signs of African influence, gave slaves a measure of dignity and psychological independence.

### **B. Slavery in the New Territories:**

#### **1. Manifest Destiny:**

Because Americans believed that their national security was threatened by British activity in Texas, California, and Oregon, westward expansion reached a new peak on intensity in the 1840's. However, this expansion was most importantly due to the beliefs of the 'manifest destiny' published a New York edition in 1845.

Manifest destiny reflected the belief that Providence had intended the U.S. to control the entire North American continent. This justified the conquest of 'lesser breeds' like the Indians and Mexicans by land-hungry pioneers. But running through Manifest Destiny, there was an idea of idealism: the conviction that the enlargement of the American territory was the best means of promoting the spread of democratic ideals and institutions. Such ideas became the driving force of public policy, which resulted in the annexation of Texas, the acquisition of California, New Mexico, and Utah, all which resulted from American victory in its war against Mexico (1846-48).

## **2. The Compromise of 1850:**

The acquisition of new lands brought along the struggle over slavery. Although Congressman David Wilmot Proviso proposed a bill to prohibit slavery in any lands acquired from Mexico, the Wilmot Proviso was defeated in the Senate because of Southern opposition. As a countermeasure, Congressman John C. Calhoun of South Carolina introduced a resolution known as the Platform of the South, asserting that Congress had no constitutional authority to prevent the citizens of any state from migrating there with their property, including their slave property. As it was expected, Northerners rejected the Calhoun's resolution.

When the thirty-first congress met in 1849, the Union was in danger. The returning Senator Henry Clay introduced in the Senate a set of resolutions that inaugurated a seven-month debate in Congress. In the ensuing Compromise of 1850, Congress agreed that California be admitted as a free state, that a new Fugitive Slave Act be passed, and that slavery in the rest of the territories acquired from Mexico to be decided by their respective settlers on the time of admission to the Union ( according to the doctrine of 'Popular Sovereignty' advocated by Stephen A. Douglas.

## **3. The Revival of Conflict:**

When Franklin Pierce was elected President in 1852, the slavery agitation was reviving. Because the Fugitive Slave Law (which obliged states to arrest runaway slaves and send them back to their owners) was the most important acquisition made by Southerners from the Compromise of 1850, they were determined to resist any attempt to modify or repeal it. On the other hand, Northerners found its provisions unacceptable and tried to obstruct or even nullify it. On some occasions, the law was openly defied when northern whites defied the local authorities by freeing fugitive slaves under arrest.

The revival of the sectional conflict over slavery was also caused by the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Act was introduced by Senator Douglas and consisted in organizing the Nebraska country into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, towards their future settlement. Although these two territories were situated north of Missouri, and thus supposedly prohibited to slavery according to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Douglas suggested that slavery there should be decided on the basis of his doctrine.

When Kansas was finally opened to settlement in 1854, movements were organized in the North and the South to send big numbers of settlers with the object of winning control of the territory. Soon the number of Kansas population reached the level required to justify statehood. Elections were organized to form a state legislature and draw a constitution and were won by the pro-slavery settlers. However, the free-settlers denounced the results because of fraud and organized their own elections.

Political division in Kansas soon led to violence and bloodshed. In May 1856, a force of pro-slavery militia marched on the free-soil town of Lawrence and terrorised the inhabitants. The revenge came a few days later when a fanatical abolitionist, John Brown, led a band of followers to attack pro-slave settlers. This was the signal for further turmoil. Armed bands from both sides searched the territory, shooting and burning without discrimination (Bleeding Kansas). When federal troops managed to restore temporarily order late in 1856, some 200 people had been killed.

As the election of 1860 approached, the tension were mounting between North and South about the issue of slavery. Political divisions led to the collapse of the one remaining nation party, the Democratic Party. This opened the way for the newly established northern Republican Party to reach power. It was clear then that the perspective of a northern politician coming to power would simply mean the total division of the country.

During the presidential campaign, Southern leaders warned that they would not remain in the Union under a sectional Northern president. Immediately after the result of the election as announced the secession movement began. By the time Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1860, seven states had seceded from the Union. Their delegates met at Montgomery, Alabama, drew a constitution for the Confederate States of America, and elected Jefferson Davis as President.

## **4. Secession and the Beginning of the Civil War:**

While secession was going under way, a variety of compromises emerged in Congress that aimed at bringing back the seceded states into the Union to avoid a clash of arms. The compromise that attracted much congressional support was the one proposed by Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky. It proposed a series of constitutional amendments aimed at appeasing Southern fears about slavery. It aimed at

guaranteeing the permanence of slavery in the slave states, Federal government payment of compensations to owners who failed to recover their fugitive slaves, and the reestablishment of the Missouri Compromise.

Although the Crittenden Compromise won support in both North and South, Lincoln opposed it. In his Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, he asserted that the Union was perpetual, that no state could secede on its own will, and that he had no intention to interfere with slavery where it already existed but that he was against its extension. He most importantly expressed his determination to execute federal laws in all states, collect duties, and maintain position of federal posts with force if necessary.

President Lincoln's first critical decision came on April 6, when he ordered the dispatch of relief expedition to Fort Sumter. Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbour, South Carolina, was the only federal property in the seceded South to remain in Union hands. Its Commander, Major Robert Anderson, made calls to get supplies or he would be obliged to evacuate the fort. Going against the advice of the majority of his Cabinet, who favoured evacuation, Lincoln believed that doing so would mean a recognition of the Confederacy; so he sent an expedition instructed to provision the fort peacefully and use force only if attacked.

Now it was Davis's turn to make a painful decision: either to accept Federal authority by allowing the fort to be provisioned or strike the first blow. He chose the latter and on April 12, 1861, when Major Anderson refused to evacuate, Confederate army opened fire. After a two-day bombardment, Fort Sumter capitulated. The Civil War had just begun.

This incident gave Lincoln a pretext to take action to preserve the Union. On April 15, he called on state governors to furnish 75,000 militia for 90 days to put down the insurrection. On April 19, he declared a blockade of the Confederate coast.

His measures led to another wave of secession. Confronted with necessity of making a choice between the Union and the Confederacy, four more states seceded: Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Now formed of eleven states, the Confederate States of America moved its capital to Richmond, Virginia.