

*The present day immigration debate often includes calls for large-scale admission of immigrants to provide a source of cheap labor to help keep America "competitive." Immigrants are supposed to do jobs that "Americans will not do." These arguments have a strangely familiar ring: they sound as if they could have been made in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1830s, or in the halls of Congress during the debate over child labor legislation in the early years of this century. We have commissioned this piece to examine these two cases, in both of which economic collapse was predicted if a cheap and exploitable labor source was lost — erroneously, as it turned out. Elizabeth Koed is a Ph. D. student in the Department of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara.*

## THE LOSS OF CHEAP LABOR AND PREDICTIONS OF ECONOMIC DISASTER: Two Case Studies

By Elizabeth K. Koed

Abundant sources of labor have always been considered a key aspect of the American economy. Particularly, the availability of a cheap labor supply has been viewed as the backbone, indeed the salvation, of certain industries. The plantation-style cotton industry of the antebellum American South is one example. With the secession crisis nearing in the mid-nineteenth century, the potential loss of slavery constantly occupied the Southern mind. As the twentieth century began, a new generation of businessmen feared the loss of yet another source of cheap labor: children. The following case studies show how tenaciously some Americans have held onto old labor systems, and the economic consequences of the loss of that cheap labor supply.

As the opposition to slavery grew over the three decades preceding the Civil War, so did the defense of that "peculiar institution." For every attack launched by a Northern abolitionist or anti-slavery crusader, a Southern intellectual responded with a calculated defense. The pro-slavery argument took many forms, and was varied to meet the immediate needs of the day. In the early 1830s the defense was often tinged with some guilt, but as secession appeared more likely in the 1850s, the pro-slavery arguments grew more militant, less defensive. A handful of educated and eloquent Southern men, offering justification for the slaveholders' world, emerged to become the voice of Southern pro-slave propaganda.

Thomas R. Dew, professor of political economy at the College of William and Mary, served as an early spokesman for the South, participating in the Virginia debates over the slavery question in 1831 and 1832. His pamphlet, *Review of the Debate* (1832), was widely read and often quoted in the years following.

George Fitzhugh, lawyer, judge, and sometime government official, spent most of his time in Port Royal, Virginia, philosophizing, usually about slavery. He frequently contributed to Southern journals and especially *DeBow's Review* throughout the 1850s and early 1860s. He published *Sociology of the South, Or the Failure of Free Society* in 1854, and from that time on made his living primarily from such writing.

James Henry Hammond, a lawyer and editor from South Carolina, twice served as governor of that state as well as in both houses of Congress. Hammond, like Fitzhugh, wrote extensively on the subject of slavery. His theories on "King Cotton" and the horrors of "wage slavery" in the North became fundamental aspects of the pro-slavery argument.

James B. DeBow's journal of economics, *DeBow's Review*, was founded in 1846 and enjoyed the largest circulation of any Southern magazine. DeBow constantly used his journal to defend slavery, even though he was not a slaveholder himself. *DeBow's Review* became the focal point of Southern pro-slavery thought in the 1850s. One of his own editorials from 1857, "The Interest In Slavery of the Southern Non-Slaveholder," perfectly summarized the

prevailing arguments.

The Southern defense of slavery was based upon several dominant themes that evolved over these three decades. In the 1830s, when the push from abolition and colonization began to be felt, Southern slaveholders frequently evoked a Biblical defense. In Genesis 9:25, for example, the statement "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" was interpreted to be justification for one man being enslaved by another. Equally prevalent was the historical argument that all great societies of the past, particularly Greece and Rome, were based upon a slave system. By having one class of people for manual labor, the upper class is freed to follow more intellectual pursuits. This, after all, was the system that allowed Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison to make their great contributions to the United States.

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The pro-slavery argument was not limited to such rhetorical devices. As the possibility of secession became more evident, these men often based their arguments on more fundamental and logical grounds. Like many Southerners, George Fitzhugh often compared Southern slavery to the "wage slavery" of the Northern mills and factories, favoring the paternalism of the plantation to the harsh realities of working-class America in Massachusetts or New York.

The economic necessity of slavery was a central theme throughout the pro-slavery crusade. Although it often shared prominence with other arguments in the 1840s and 1850s as the defenders sought higher moral ground, the fear of what emancipation might mean to the Southern economy, and particularly to Southern cotton, was never far from the minds of those who contemplated the withdrawal of this labor supply. Nearly all of the leaders of the pro-slavery crusade, as illustrated in the following quotes, voiced a sense of impending disaster if the plantation-oriented South lost its cheap labor.

*Without the institution of slavery, the great staple products of the South would cease to be grown, and the immense annual results which are distributed among every class of the community, and which give life to every branch of industry, would cease. The world furnishes no instances of these products being grown upon a large scale by free labor. --James D.B.DeBow <sup>1</sup>*

*They now fully comprehend the idea, and freely admit the fact, that if an adequate supply of cotton is to be had at all, it must come from the United States, and that the ratio of increased supply is dependent upon and exactly limited by the future accession of slave labor to the cotton growing states. --James D.B.DeBow <sup>2</sup>*

*In contemplating these facts, there presents itself this important consideration, viz., the four articles which are most necessary to modern civilization, sugar, coffee, cotton, and tobacco, are products of compulsory black labor. Whenever coercion has been removed from that labor, its productions have ceased, and the experiments to prove this fact conclusively, have been made in localities where the results, although injurious to the experimenters, have not much affected the general interests of mankind.*

*--Thomas Kettell <sup>3</sup>*

*The future supply of cotton in the United States is subject to the influence of an economic law, invariable in its operation, to wit: the law of increase of the slave population. --James D.B.DeBow <sup>4</sup>*

*You will promptly say, emancipate your slaves, and then you will have free labor on suitable terms. That might be if there were five hundred where there now is one, and the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, was as densely populated as your island [England]. But until that comes to pass, no labor can be procured in America*

*on the terms you have it....Give me half the value of my slaves, and compel them to remain and labor on my plantation, at ten to eleven cents a day, as they do in Antigua, supporting themselves and families, and you shall have them tomorrow, and if you like dub them "free."*

--James Henry Hammond <sup>5</sup>

*England sees, admits, and deplors the error of West India emancipation. This admission is but a step in a chain of argument, which must ultimately carry her further from abolition, and bring her nearer to slavery....Thus will Southern thought triumph....They should try the experiment, for should they succeed in abolishing [slavery], they will have none of those products thereafter....*

--George Fitzhugh <sup>6</sup>

*It is, in truth, the slave labor in Virginia which gives value to her soil and her habitations; take away this, and you pull down the Atlas that upholds the whole system; eject from the State the whole slave population, and we risk nothing in the prediction, that on the day in which it shall be accomplished, the worn soils of Virginia would not bear the paltry price of the government lands in the West, and the Old Dominion will be a 'waste howling wilderness'; --'the grass shall be seen growing in the streets, and the foxes peeping from their holes.'*

--Thomas R. Dew <sup>7</sup>

It cannot be denied that the South was devastated by the Civil War. The loss of life (white and black) and the destruction of crops and property crippled many aspects of the Southern economy. The railroads and the manufacturing sector rapidly recovered after the war, however, and by 1870 James DeBow was able to declare that the "railroads...are all in good operating condition and make as good time as they did before the war." <sup>8</sup> New investment in the Southern textile industry encouraged a manufacturing sector that previously had been very small and not well

diversified, helping it to prosper through the rest of the nineteenth century.

Agriculture, however, was indeed badly disrupted. The radical shift from slave to free labor certainly affected the efficiency of Southern agriculture for the next decade. But had the dire predictions of men like Fitzhugh and Dew proven to be true? Did the abolition of slavery destroy the Southern agricultural economy?

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***"It was the South's failure to industrialize at a rate equal to the North that made post-war recovery difficult."***

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The withdrawal of a free source of labor was certainly one cause of the South's economic troubles after the war. It is estimated that the black participation rate in the Southern labor force decreased by one-third or more.<sup>9</sup> Freed blacks refused to work the long hours forced upon them by slavery, and resisted efficient gang-style labor, even when paid wages, because of its similarity to bondage. Black women began assuming more traditional female roles, often refusing any field work at all. But many economic historians believe the South's "king cotton" system was doomed anyway. "The South had suffered defeat and devastation," wrote Gavin Wright, "and had been through a decade of disruption and turmoil...but cotton's loss of status and leverage in world affairs would have occurred even if none of these dramatic events [of the war] had taken place, and the South's own position would have followed cotton in decline."<sup>10</sup> It was the South's failure to industrialize at a rate equal to the North that made post-war recovery difficult. "The real failing of the southern economic system," wrote Susan Previant Lee and Walter Passell, "was its lack of flexibility."<sup>11</sup> The prosperity of the antebellum cotton industry slowed the progress of technology and the development of skills that would be needed to compete in the post-war era. Added to this problem was the Confederacy's decision to halt nearly all of its cotton exports during the war, in hopes of bringing a cotton-dependent England into the war on the Confederate side. Union blockades further interfered with the remaining export



trade. This effectively destroyed a lucrative market that the South previously had taken for granted, as England and other buyers turned to new sources of cotton, especially India. According to Lee and Passell, even this depletion of markets had causes other than war and emancipation. With or without the war, they wrote, "it would have been impossible for the South to continue along the path that had led to economic success before 1860. ...Cotton, the foundation for an agricultural empire, could support only a finite amount of weight."<sup>12</sup>

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Despite these difficulties, post-war recovery did come. The labor supply began to stabilize during the 1870s. According to Robert Fogel, the transition "involved breaking the gangs into smaller units called 'squads,' and these eventually gave way to the leasing of land to the families of the ex-slaves, either for a cash rent or a share of the crop." By 1880, black labor force participation was close to pre-war levels.<sup>13</sup> The rate of export of cotton to England also reached pre-war levels by 1880, and continued to climb. As one Southerner, John T. Burns, Comptroller General of Georgia, stated in 1866:

*Even the most sanguine are astonished at the zeal and energy displayed by our people in reconstructing their private fortunes. Our railroads have been repaired, commercial intercourse with the world reopened, cities and villages which were but a few months since masses of charred ruins rebuilt as if by magic, and our planting interest, though less prosperous than heretofore, owing to the change of labor and unpropitious seasons, has not been less active. We have every reason to hope that this is but the beginning, the ground swell of a great and glorious future, if fortune will continue to favor us.<sup>14</sup>*

Thus, contemporaries who experienced the South's post-war economic difficulties as the region converted rapidly to free labor agreed with subsequent economic historians that the causes of slow recovery in Southern agriculture did not include free labor. Wartime devastation, disruption of European markets, the decline of export-crop cotton, and the transition period needed to move to a new labor system were sufficient to cause a weak post-war Southern economy.<sup>15</sup> In any event, those who protested the abolition of slavery had not predicted a difficult period of adjustment, but rather predicted that crops simply could not be brought in, profitably, by free labor. Yet the Southern cotton crop of 5.3 million bales annually before the war, dropping to 2.0 million in 1865, reached 5.7 million bales by 1880.<sup>16</sup> Both the bosses and the rural labor force rather quickly adjusted, and proved that the work could be done without slaves, contrary to dire predictions. The fact that the cotton-tobacco system could not be returned to pre-war glories was due to other causes. And, in the longer perspective of a century or more, the withdrawal of slave labor was the precondition for the resurgent Southern economy of today, converging relentlessly but slowly toward the national average.<sup>17</sup>

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The problem of child labor in the United States did not begin with the industrial revolution. Rooted in the ancient practice of apprenticeship, the employment of children had been a fundamental aspect of the working force for many years. But the sight of children as young as four or five years old toiling in mines, factories and mills created a new awareness. As early as 1813 Connecticut tried to regulate child labor through mandatory school attendance, and Massachusetts opted for literacy tests in 1836. By 1890 some states had limited working hours to ten per day with a minimum age of fourteen or sixteen in hazardous work. Progress had been made, Progressive-era reformers believed, but much was left to be done. Across America, factories, mills, mines and fields still claimed thousands of children in daily work--one-fifth of the working force--often laboring twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week.

The lack of consistency and effectiveness of state laws forced the issue onto a national stage, and by

1904 people like Florence Kelley and Albert J. Beveridge were calling for federal laws to abolish this evil. Proclaiming that the United States could not "permit any man or corporation to stunt the bodies, minds, and souls of American children," Senator Beveridge of Indiana introduced a bill to prohibit the interstate commerce of the products of child labor.<sup>18</sup> The time was not ripe for federal legislation, however, and the Beveridge Bill failed to pass Congress. Disappointed, Beveridge reluctantly supported a lesser bill to regulate child labor in the District of Columbia, a bill that President Theodore Roosevelt hoped would serve as a model for additional state laws, but even that bill was repeatedly tabled. "We will have to wait a while," Beveridge said in 1908, "for more ammunition in the way of facts."<sup>19</sup>

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Although the Beveridge Bill failed, it did shed light on the old problem. It also flashed warning signs to other reformers that the road would be difficult, and to those opposed to child labor legislation that they had better get organized. The American Federation of Labor, the Y.W.C.A., and the American Federation of Teachers were among those who actively pursued federal legislation by 1914. Mine owners, manufacturers and glass factory operators filled the ranks of the opposition. But the most vehement opposition to child labor legislation came from what many considered the last bastion of child labor abuse: the Southern textile mills. David Clark, editor of the *Southern Textile Bulletin*, led the way for the Southern Cotton Manufacturers.

A revised version of the Beveridge Bill, the Palmer-Owen Bill, came before Congress in 1915, heating up a debate over federal legislation that would last another two decades. By the time it became the Keating-Owen Bill in 1916, the sides were clearly drawn. The National Child Labor Committee (formed in 1904), Samuel Gompers and the A.F. of L., and photographer Lewis Hine diligently pursued federal

legislation to root out "child slavery," and they particularly attacked the South. "We are fighting to emancipate the white children of the South from industrial slavery," Senator Edward Keating said.<sup>20</sup> David Clark, using his *Southern Textile Bulletin* as his mouthpiece, skillfully defended the Southern cotton interests, deflecting the hazards of child labor with issues of constitutionality.

Despite Clark's organized resistance, the Keating-Owen Bill passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by Woodrow Wilson. But Clark soon turned this defeat into victory. While Southern mills and factories prepared to comply with the new regulations, Clark vowed to test the new law in the courts.<sup>21</sup> Fourteen year old Reuben Dagenhart of Charlotte, North Carolina, coached by Clark, claimed the Keating-Owen Bill violated his constitutional "right to work" in the Fidelity Manufacturing Company. Of course, Dagenhart was only a pawn in Clark's larger scheme, but the game was won nonetheless, and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court. On June 3, 1918, the highest court declared the Keating-Owen law unconstitutional (5 to 4 vote) on the grounds that it was not a regulation of interstate commerce, but an infringement on states' rights.<sup>22</sup>

A similar scenario was played out over and over with Clark and the Southern Cotton Manufacturers "testing" each new law. In 1924 reformers turned to a constitutional amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age. Once again, almost all opposition came from the South. The Amendment passed both houses of Congress, but failed ratification when it went to state legislatures. Eventually, national events beyond the control of child labor reformers brought the progress they had actively pursued for so long. The Great Depression threw thousands of adults into unemployment, lessening the need for children as cheap labor, and New Deal programs (first, the National Recovery Act and, later, the Fair Labor Standards Act) incorporated child labor regulations into broader legislation. For reformers, a forty-year crusade ended in the knowledge that existing state laws and New Deal legislation had all but eliminated child labor.

The arguments against federal child labor legislation took many forms. The 1906 and 1916 bills

brought charges from Southern mill owners of a Northern-controlled Congress seeking to hinder the South's ability to compete in the industrial economy. Many claimed any federal law was unnecessary since the states had already dealt with the problem on their own. By 1924 David Clark and the Southern Cotton Manufacturers had created an array of arguments centering on the federal government's infringement of states' rights, including accusations that any such amendment was communist-inspired. Men such as Henry S. Pritchett of the Carnegie Foundation accused the crusade of being a plot to control the lives of individual Americans, while others claimed it undermined parental authority over children's household chores.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the overabundance of such rhetoric in the literature of the opposition, there was another, more basic argument to be found, first in the state efforts and again in the national efforts at reform. Many mine operators, sugar beet farmers, factory owners, and especially Southern mill owners predicted economic disaster if child labor--cheap labor--was abolished. R. M. Miller of Charlotte, North Carolina, who eventually became president of the American Cotton Manufacturers Association, believed a North Carolina child labor law would cause irreparable harm to the mills since seventy-five percent of the spinners were currently under fourteen years of age.<sup>24</sup> Other Southern mill owners claimed they would lose their competitive edge over New England mills if child labor laws were established, and that the South would never reach the same level of industrialization as the North without the benefits of this cheap labor force. The following quotes are examples of arguments frequently heard throughout this time period.

*Now, gentlemen, I have investigated this matter and I will say that if the McKelway bill is passed that it will clog the wheels of industry in North Carolina for ever and ever. I say, gentlemen, that you must come down to this in a practical, common-sense way and investigate what effect it would have on the mills of North Carolina not to allow children of 13 to work in the mills; estimate what [effect] it would have not to allow children of 16 years of age to work at night. I say to you when you take that little boy out of the mill, you take the little*

*spinner out of the mill, you might as well sweep that mill out of existence.*

--A North Carolina mill owner<sup>25</sup>

*I do know a great majority of cotton picked in the Southern States is picked by children, both white and black, under the age of 16. If this law should be made to include all classes of children, it would be absolutely impossible to gather this great commodity from the fields in our country.*

--Samuel Jones Nicholls<sup>26</sup>

*In the first place the employees themselves can not do without the wages they earn in the mills; in the next place, the mills of North Carolina can not do without the help. That is all there is to it.*

--A mill owner<sup>27</sup>

*The [Keating-Owen] bill seemed aimed at southern cotton mills and its provisions were radical and drastic in the extreme. It would have meant in continuous operation extreme hardships in many, many cases.*

--J. C. Patton, Industrial Editor for the *Charlotte Observer*<sup>28</sup>

*This [Keating-Owen Bill] would confine the cotton mills of the South to a strictly home business. ...It was a cleverly designed measure and if it should have held in law it would have destroyed the cotton mill industry of the South as a whole.*

--Charlotte Observer Editorial<sup>29</sup>

*The question then arises as to the effect upon agricultural production. Could we house our cotton, tobacco, vegetables, berries and fruits? There are many who believe the result would be disastrous. My own opinion is that it would for many years result in a commercial loss in the value of production from three and a half to four billion dollars annually in agriculture alone.*

--Joseph T. Deal<sup>30</sup>



After such predictions, what were the economic effects of child labor legislation? Child labor laws went into effect in several states north of the Mason-Dixon line, and the textile industry, where the most impact was anticipated, quickly adjusted. In 1918, as the Supreme Court struck down the Keating-Owen law, a voice of the textile industry reported that the parts of the industry forced by state law to do without child labor had coped. The *Textile World Journal* no longer predicted doom or fought such measures, and actually expressed gratitude for the measure in retrospect:

*The decision of the Supreme Court declaring the Keating-Owen child labor law unconstitutional is not nearly as important today as it would have been had it been rendered before the effects of the bill had been given a thorough test. It can be stated without fear of effective contradiction that it has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of most manufacturers that the labor of children under fourteen years of age is not only inefficient in itself, but tends to lower the efficiency of all departments in which they are employed....*<sup>31</sup>

Despite the failures at the national level, the reformers' goals were eventually achieved. Partly due to a desire to improve living conditions and partly due to the need to show federal legislation to be unnecessary, states passed their own child labor laws. Even the Southern manufacturing states passed fairly acceptable laws between 1915 and 1925, although they fell far short of the goals of Beveridge or Keating. As industry adjusted to the requirements of such laws, its leaders realized that economic survival, and indeed prosperity, did not depend upon the exploitation of children. Even the *Manufacturer's Record* claimed that "low wages are in the end the costliest wages: low wages always have been unprofitable."<sup>32</sup> The cotton industry did experience decline in the 1920s and 1930s as the world demand for cotton decreased and the economy plummeted, but that demise, like the post-Civil War situation, had causes other than the loss of a cheap labor supply.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James D.B. DeBow, "The Interest in Slavery of the Southern Non-Slaveholder," (1860) found in Eric L. McKittrick, ed., *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1963), p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>James D.B. DeBow, "Southern Slavery and the Cotton Trade," *DeBow's Review*, July 1857 (vol. 23), p. 481.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Kettell, "The Future of the South," *DeBow's Review*, 1856 (vol. 22), p. 314. Thomas Kettell was a New York writer.

<sup>4</sup>James D.B. DeBow, "Supply and Consumption of Cotton," *DeBow's Review*, 1857 (vol. 22), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup>James Henry Hammond, "Letter to an English Abolitionist," found in Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 185, 199.

<sup>6</sup>George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought," found in Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery*, pp. 284-5.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas R. Dew, "Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature" (1832), found in McKittrick, *Slavery Defended*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup>Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup>Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1978) p. 158.

<sup>11</sup>Susan Previant Lee and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1979) p. 264.

<sup>12</sup>Lee and Passell, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>13</sup>Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>Southern agriculture and cotton have been treated as synonymous here. This is not to deny other important aspects of Southern agriculture, but rather to concentrate on the predictions of the pro-slavery advocates. Rarely did such predictions include sugar, rice, or even tobacco, since cotton had been the backbone of the Southern plantation system. Sugar and tobacco suffered a similar fate as cotton: heavy losses immediately after the war but recovering quite quickly. Only the rice industry of South Carolina and Georgia was ruined. As economic historian Peter Coclanis has shown, however, the rice industry was failing even before the war, and by 1860 the per capita wealth in rice-producing areas was declining. The post-war devastation of the rice industry, like cotton's problems, had many causes. It is clear, Coclanis has written, "that neither the war nor the transition to free labor helped the competitive position of the low-country rice industry. But these developments did not kill it in and of themselves" (p. 132). The South's low-country rice production has always catered to distant markets--the North, the West, Europe, South America--and in the nineteenth century the competition from India, and even Texas, "knocked low-country rice out of Europe, out of the American market, and, eventually, out altogether" (p. 135). For more information see Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989), especially pp. 111-158.

<sup>16</sup>Robert Kelley, *The Shaping of the American Past* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1986) Vol.I, p. 366.

<sup>17</sup>There were at least two contemporaries of Fitzhugh, DeBow, et al, who predicted this very outcome. Hinton Rowan Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South: How To Meet It* (1860) argued that the availability of slave labor and the plantation system it supported was at the root of Southern economic weakness, and that the South must turn in a new direction.

In ease and luxury we have been lolling long enough; we should now bestir ourselves, and keep pace with the progress of the age. We must expand our energies, and acquire habits of enterprise and industry;...We must begin to feed on a more substantial diet than

that of pro-slavery politics;...Before us there is a vast work to be accomplished—a work which has been accumulating on our hands for many years. It is no less a work than that of infusing the spirit of liberty into all our systems of commerce, agriculture, manufactures, government, literature, and religion. Oligarchal despotism must be overthrown; slavery must be abolished (p. 358).

Helper blamed the institution of slavery not only for the slow rate of industrialization, but also for the massive destruction of land to fuel the slave-driven economy. His strongest argument, however, cited slavery as the cause of the dismal condition of poor whites in the South, since slavery robbed them of badly needed jobs.

Another contemporary, Frederick Law Olmsted, wrote *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (1862) in which he echoed many of Helper's ideas. Olmsted had the advantage of being an outsider (not from the South) and tried to describe the effects of slavery in dispassionate and logical arguments. He concurred with Helper that slavery slowed the pace of progress and held the South prisoner to a feudal agricultural system. For more information see Helper's *The Impending Crisis* (New York, A.B. Burdick, 1860) and Olmsted's *The Cotton Kingdom* (New York, Mason Brothers, 1862). Helper's role in the abolition crusade is well-covered in George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 28-53.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in John Braeman, *Albert J. Beveridge: American Nationalist* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 113.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Arden J. Lea, "Cotton Textiles and the Federal Child Labor Act of 1916," *Labor History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Fall, 1975), p. 493.

<sup>21</sup>See especially *Southern Textile Bulletin*, September 21, 1916.

<sup>22</sup>Elizabeth H. Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1939), pp. 263-265. *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, 247. U.S. 251, 281.

<sup>23</sup>Such arguments are well documented in journals and magazines of the time. The November 8, 1924 issue of *School and Society* includes Pritchett's argument. *The Literary Digest* of December 6, 1924 summed up the rhetoric in "The Battle Over the Child Labor Amendment" (pp. 12-14). The 1938 issue of *The Public Opinion Quarterly* (vol. 2, No. 1) presented its own summary in "Propaganda and the Proposed Child Labor Amendment" by J.E. Hulett, Jr. (pp. 105-114).

<sup>24</sup>C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 416.

<sup>25</sup>Mill owner appearing before the North Carolina Legislature in 1906, name withheld. Quoted in *Congressional Record-Senate*, January 28, 1907, Vol. 41, p. 1819, during debate on the Beveridge Bill.

<sup>26</sup>Samuel Jones Nicholls, Representative from South Carolina, from *Congressional Record-House*, January 26, 1916, Vol. 53, p. 1582.

<sup>27</sup>A mill owner appearing before the North Carolina Legislature in 1906, name withheld. Quoted in *Congressional Record-Senate*, January 28, 1907, Vol. 41, p. 1819, during debate on the Beveridge Bill.

<sup>28</sup>J.C. Patton, Industrial Editor, "Keating Bill is Void," in *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), June 9, 1918, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup>Unnamed editorial, *The Charlotte Observer*, June 4, 1918, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph T. Deal, Representative from Virginia, debating the effects of the 1924 Constitutional Amendment, from *Congressional Record-House*, June 3, 1924, p. 10366.

<sup>31</sup>The *Textile World Journal* is quoted in Stephen B. Wood, *Constitutional Politics in the Progressive Era: Child Labor and the Law* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 172.

<sup>32</sup>Gavin Wright, "Cheap Labor and Southern Textiles, 1880-1930," in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. XCVI, No. 4 (November 1981), p. 627.

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A recent issue of *American Demographics* points to population figures as it emphasizes market opportunities for its subscribers:

"Today's US Asian population is almost 8 million, or 3 percent of the total US population and, largely due to immigration, is the fastest-growing group of people in the nation."

"Today's US Hispanic population is 20.1 million, 8.2 percent of the entire population. It is growing at a rate nearly five times as fast as the rate of growth of the non-Hispanic population since 1980."



*"The past is prologue" said Shakespeare, and we use the phrase for a continuing department of THE SOCIAL CONTRACT. The abuse of immigrant labor is a sad part of our history and the specter of the sweatshop is still with us. The following chapter out of our history is written by Arthur J. Linenthal, M.D. of Chestnut Hill, MA, is copyright 1990 by Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, and is reprinted by permission from THE PHAROS, Fall 1990.*

## PAST AND PRESENT: ALWAYS THE SWEATSHOP?

By Arthur J. Linenthal, M.D.

Once again, with "millions of new immigrants...creating a vast pool of poor and easily exploitable workers,"<sup>1,p.26</sup> we are seeing an "explosive growth of sweatshops,"<sup>1,p.26</sup> --places where "workers are employed for long hours at low wages and under unhealthy conditions."<sup>2</sup> And "it has become a national shame" that "children are among the...most widely exploited workers."

*They live in poverty and neglect as they harvest our food, work in hundreds of dingy factories stitching "Made in America" tags into our clothes, assemble cheap jewelry in trailer homes and tenements, operate dangerous machines in restaurant kitchens and neighborhood stores....*

*Often they are scalded and burned, sliced up by food machines, exposed to pesticides in the field and choking fumes in the factory. They fall and fracture their backs, and break their arms frequently delivering and picking things up for us.*

*Sometimes, they are left badly maimed and disfigured for life.*

*Sometimes, they are killed.*

*Nearly all the time, they get tired, miss school and are ignored.<sup>3,p.1</sup>*

The situation is reminiscent of the early 1900s, when other millions of new immigrants--men, women, and children--also formed a pool of cheap exploitable labor. Tenement house workrooms, for example, where the occupants manufactured clothing...fostered dreadful conditions. Material was cut in factories and then handed over to contractors who arranged for the apparel to be finished in the tenements. The contractors found their profit by obtaining service from immigrant women whose capacity for work was limited only by the quantity of material they could get

and by their endurance.

A physician serving as a state health inspector, described conditions in tenement workrooms in Boston, Massachusetts:

*One woman, for example, in addition to her housework and the care of three children, has to work from fourteen to fifteen hours a day on the sewing machine in order to make one dozen pairs of overalls, for which she gets seventy-five cents. Out of this pittance she pays for the delivery of the goods both ways. Her earnings support the whole family consisting of an alcoholic, shiftless husband and three children. Not only do the women work excessively long hours, but in the evening other members of the family are drafted into service. The vitality and powers of resistance of the tenement workers are thus lowered by the unsanitary conditions of the homes and by the excessively long hours of work. They fall an easy prey to all forms of disease,...and become a public menace.<sup>4,pp.32-33</sup>*

Pulmonary tuberculosis was of particular concern. Overcrowding, overwork, poor general sanitation, poor ventilation, and lack of sunlight all contributed to the development and spread of this dread disease. Careless spitting was a common habit, and the organisms could survive in sputum for months. The physician reported a striking example of this problem:

*In September, 1907, a two-room flat in a narrow, dirty street in the North End was visited. In the two rooms there lived a young man of twenty-five with his mother and grandmother. The two women finished trousers at home--their only means of subsistence. The young man was so ill with tuberculosis that he was unable to work. A small, low-studded room used as a kitchen and workroom*