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The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery And The Making Of American Capitalism



Synopsis

Americans tend to cast slavery as a pre-modern institution—the nation’s original sin, perhaps, but isolated in time and divorced from America’s later success. But to do so robs the millions who suffered in bondage of their full legacy. As historian Edward E. Baptist reveals in *The Half Has Never Been Told*, the expansion of slavery in the first eight decades after American independence drove the evolution and modernization of the United States. In the span of a single lifetime, the South grew from a narrow coastal strip of worn-out tobacco plantations to a continental cotton empire, and the United States grew into a modern, industrial, and capitalist economy. Told through intimate slave narratives, plantation records, newspapers, and the words of politicians, entrepreneurs, and escaped slaves, *The Half Has Never Been Told* offers a radical new interpretation of American history. Winner of the 2015 Avery O. Craven Prize from the Organization of American Historians Winner of the 2015 Sidney Hillman Prize Bloomberg View Top Ten Nonfiction Books of 2014 Daily Beast Best Nonfiction Books of 2014

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Customer Reviews

Wall Street Journal—Abolitionists were contemptuous of such self-serving nonsense, but they too tended to see slavery as an economically inefficient, and morally reprehensible, hangover from the premodern past. . . . In *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Edward E. Baptist takes passionate issue with such assumptions. He asserts that slavery was neither inherently inefficient nor a counterpoint to capitalism. Rather, he says, it was woven inextricably into the transnational fabric of

early 19th-century capitalism.... Baptist writes with verve and a good eye for the dramatic.â •New York Times Book Review“Baptist's work is a valuable addition to the growing literature on slavery and American development.... Baptist has a knack for explaining complex financial matters in lucid prose.... The Half Has Never Been Told's underlying argument is persuasive.â •Vikas Bajaj, New York Times“New books like Empire of Cotton and The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism by Edward Baptist offer gripping and more nuanced stories of economic history.â •Los Angeles Times“The overwhelming power of the stories that Baptist recounts, and the plantation-level statistics he's compiled, give his book the power of truth and revelation.â •Daily Beast“Thoughtful, unsettling.... Baptist turns the long-accepted argument that slavery was economically inefficient on its head, and argues that it was an integral part of America's economic rise.â •Nation“Wonderful.... Baptist provides meticulous, extensive, and comprehensive evidence that capitalism and the wealth it created was absolutely dependent on the forced labor of Africans and African-Americans, downplaying culturalist arguments for Western prosperity.â •Providence Journal Best Books of 2014“Baptist's exhaustively researched, elegantly written and provocatively argued book details the connection between the growth of the institution of human bondage and economic innovations from 1783–1861.â •Guardian Australia Best Books of 2014“A compelling case for recognizing slavery as fundamental to the rise of the United States.â •Seattle Times“[Baptist] presents a detailed case, showing how the American economy benefited from profits gained by forced labor and financial instruments that enabled investors to profit from slavery.â •Huffington Post Black Voices blog“Quite a gripping read. Baptist weaves deftly between analysis of economic data and narrative prose to paint a picture of American slavery that is pretty different from what you may have learned in high school Social Studies class.â •Salon“Baptist's real achievement is to ground these financial abstractions in the lives of ordinary people. In vivid passages, he describes the sights, smells and suffering of slavery. He writes about individual families torn apart by global markets. Above all, Baptist sets out to show how America's rise to power is inextricable from the suffering of black slaves.â •Washington Independent Review of Books“Edward Baptist's The Half Has Never Been Told is an achievement of the first order.... With Baptist's meticulous research and comprehensive, chronological approach, the other half of the story has now been told, and told very well.â •Mashable“Baptist has a fleet, persuasive take on the materialist underpinnings of the 'peculiar institution.'"

Edward E. Baptist is an associate professor of history at Cornell University. Author of the award-winning *Creating an Old South*, he lives in Ithaca, New York.

Edward Baptist makes several strong arguments, some of which turn conventional wisdom on its head. Some of his arguments are difficult to read and go against our preferred versions of U.S. history. He details how American slavery was one of the most productive economic institutions in world history and how the expansion of slavery made the U.S. into a modern industrial empire. He details how slavery, by use of torture and terrorism, increased productivity and made the cotton industry the biggest, most sustained, expansion of the economy in human history. He makes the point that it wasn't just a Southern industry; indeed it benefitted the entire world -- from Northern banks, ship builders and industries that supported slavery (farm implements, whips, ropes, chains, etc) to the textile mills of Western Europe, especially Britain. And he makes a good argument that slavery would not have died if it hadn't been for the Civil War. Indeed, from the founding of the nation, slavery had grown for 70 years at a rate unprecedented in human history. There's no evidence to suggest that such a profitable and productive industry would have ever died out on its own accord. He shows that the cotton industry was never as productive again, after it lost its use of the whip. Finally, he points out that the South brought about their own destruction. It was they that always pushed for more and more expansion of slavery (even contemplating taking over Cuba and all of Mexico!), which pushed Northerners into fearing for their own loss of political power. The Southern push for ever-growing slavery culminated in the creation of the new Republican Party, formed to not end slavery but to end its expansion. The South then went to war in order to create its own government based on slavery. Thankfully, they were destroyed. It's a very well written book that not only makes his arguments with well researched historical documents. He also adds powerful voice to the millions of men, women and children who suffered under the bondage of slavery.

We don't think of slavery enough as the U.S. Original Sin that dominated economics and politics during the country's formation. The reformulation of the civil war as a glorious lost cause is unique among defeated ideologies. There are no Cambodian statues to important Khmer Rouge leaders; or prominent nazi statues in Germany. Books like this that attack the prevailing revisionist history about the South and those that benefited from slave labor are critical. Truly an important book

Five stars!!!!!! Fantastic book!!! It is not easy to go through the suffering described. But the author at the end gave us a reason for hope of a better future. I used the Kindle version with audio in my

Iphone. Both performed perfectly.

This really is a must read. It will open your eyes to the economics of slavery and how the South used and manipulated the banking system as well as it's people. Almost mirrors the recent economic and housing collapse, albeit with human beings.

Excellent read. It's a down right shame. They didn't teach this perspective in school history classes. It should be required reading in American History class.

This book should be required reading in American History classes. A stunning, exhaustive study of the origins and ramifications of the black and white divide in this country.

Here, without false patriotic embellishment, or sentimentalism, is the true story of slavery, and how for the last three centuries, it came to dominate every aspect of the American consciousness, and shadow the American way of life. In America, despite its self-congratulatory democratic pretenses to the contrary, there was no political, moral, religious or economic imperatives, or an alternative higher consciousness, than the will to buy and sell human flesh for profit. Simply put, this book shows how slavery and its meanings were intertwined with the development of capitalism, and how together they have co-evolved to continuously dominate the American mind from the colonial era well into the present. In this book, the institution that made America ceases to be a quaint abstraction. Here, without benefit of its normal disingenuous rosy blinkers, slavery is seen for what it was: literally the "meat and bones" of a horribly destructive and evil way of life, one built up on the backs of those shackled in irons for a nine thousand mile voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in the filthy cubby-holes of boats, to a forced-march through the swamps of Louisiana, where their bodies were greased-up for the slave markets of New Orleans, and then were "seasoned with the whip," and put to "pushing" to increase their labor output. The unmistakable justification for this unmitigated evil way was, and has always been: the great profits and riches that slaves could bring. Cotton, tobacco, slaves and the whip, became not just the engines of American capitalism, but also its ideology and its way of life. The brutality of slavery and capitalism developed hand-in-hand; you could not have had one without the other. Period. There were no "moral-free zones," for the American conscience, no sacred corners of the American way of life tucked away off limits and protected from the willful self-generated evil of slavery. All institutions, peoples, and ideologies were implicated in, corrupted by, or ruled by slavery. Even the morally pristine Quakers and other

abolitionist religious groups, at one time or another succumbed to either owning or exploiting slaves. And even when religious guilt did eventually get the best of them, forcing them out into a "existential moral clearing," where they had no choice but to confront their own consciences and face the contradictions of what it meant to engage in a way of life that was so utterly evil, they still remained white supremacist racists to the bitter end. In the modern American mind, erroneously we have come to equate abolitionism with being "anti-racist," and "anti-racism" with, being "pro-black." However, as we see, this book frees us from that disillusionment. In fact, both equations were wrong, as it remains as true today, as it was during the colonial era, that other than blacks themselves, there is no "pro-black" constituency in American society. Anti-racism in America does not mean "pro-black," nor does it mean "anti-white supremacy," either. Here we have the names and addresses of the perpetrators given through the horror stories of their victims. Slaves have been abruptly awakened from the dead to provide their testimonies of their day-to-day lives through a uniquely American made hell. And even though the truth of their stories will remain palpable forever, their stories are not provided here in the typical way, as just another opportunity for false white empathy for the victims to be used to misdirect attention away from the white perpetrators. Here, the testimonies are provided as a sober reminder, and as an opportunity to reflect on, just how addictive the drug of slavery really was; and on just how utterly evil slavery in America really was. As a consequence of this evil intoxication, this book shows just how utterly evil men had to be, to continuously run the risk each day of their lives of being overrun by the slaves who they had shackled in order to steal labor from them for the entirety of their lives. This canvas of evil, this dark cloud of all-pervasive fear makes up the main constituent part of American culture. The fear of slave revolts, of race mixing, and the deepest fear of all: that revenge would eventually be exacted for the crimes committed against slave women, all implemented through brutality, rape, use of the whip, callousness, and general meanness, is what inexorably evolved into the American way of life that we have today. And make no mistake about it, the American way is still one ruled by the same primitive racial fears and traits that have pervaded American culture since the colonial days, and continues to do so today, three centuries later. Witness exhibit number one: our 45th President-elect, Mr. Donald Trump. This American continent, "the continent of slavery," is the same one that now curiously claims as its moral patrimony, democracy, freedom, equality, justice and religious brotherhood. But in a culture that has evolved from slavery, those traits mysteriously still get stopped at the color line, and thus are not the true moral patrimony of the American way of life. Today's police culture and subconscious racism, and the trail of fears that comes as its baggage, makes clear that the midwife of American culture has always been fear, racial brutality, callousness and meanness. These are all

racial meanings inherited directly from slavery, not from democracy. How could these maestros, drunk with "slashing with the whip," so dependent on slavery for their own survival, have so smoothly flipped the switch from three centuries of unmitigated brutality and evil against their black brothers, to suddenly changing overnight into democracy, equality, justice, and religious brotherhood? Can it really be done without permanent scar tissue? I don't think so. Ten stars

A must read for every serious student of American History and Race

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