

The Story of American Freedom¹

By George W. Stocking, Jr.²

Since my comments will serve only as partial basis for a later integrated report, it seemed appropriate to offer them in unintegrated topical form.

Despite the suggestion on page 229 that slavery was "a way of life," it is in fact treated in narrow, sterile, and naively economic terms as a labor system pure and simple. Witness the definition on page 161: "Such a system of securing workers through ownership is called *slavery*." The major account of its development (pages 229-30) is couched in a similar framework: "A new country needs workers. . . . [The English] met this need in two ways. . . . [Although the first Negroes were bound servants], slavery later became common. . . . Slavery increased in the South, where it met a need for workers . . . [on] large plantations where only one crop was grown. . . . [The cotton gin increased the need for workers, which] brought an increase in slavery." The information offered as to its extent is at best misleading. The statement that it was "accepted in the South" is supplemented by the fact that many Southerners did not own slaves and that there were 18,000 free Negroes in New Orleans alone. Since this is the only numerical statement having to do with slavery in the whole book, one cannot help wondering if it was not intended to minimize the magnitude of the problem. As to the character of the slave system as "a way of life," we are given no more than incidental clues. On page 149 we are told that Negro women and children rode in wagons to Mississippi while the slave men walked; on page 165, that Negro slaves sometimes ran away to Florida; on page 230, that slaves "often ran away." But there is no inkling of the reasons why they might have run away, no mention of the slave trade, of the problems of discipline and order, no indication that Negro resistance to slavery ever took any other form than individual escape, no suggestion of the social or psychological meaning of slavery either for the Negro or the Southern white beyond the idea that the difference in labor systems was at the root of sectional conflict.

Abolition, Civil War, and Reconstruction

One feels that this book treads a very narrow course between a dominant traditional concern for Southern prejudices and a dawning con-

¹ Edna McGuire, *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961. This is a basic textbook for grade five.

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