

The Growth of America¹

By Lawrence W. Levine²

The first mention of Negroes in this book is with relation to their introduction into Virginia "as slaves" in 1619. There is no mention of where they came from nor is the continent of Africa mentioned once in this book. At no time in the discussion of slavery is there any attempt to explain what slavery actually was or how it differed from other labor systems such as indentured servitude which receives several paragraphs. The reasons given for the introduction of slavery are wholly economic: "No one person could do by himself all the work that was necessary for growing crops on such a large piece of land, so the Southern planter had slaves to help him" (page 78). There is no attempt to explain why slavery was wholly *Negro* slavery. This seems to be taken for granted. In the rather extended discussion of the colonial plantation economy there is no direct description of the life and condition of the slaves though there is a strong intimation that it was quite decent.

The slaves did most of the work, but the plantation owner worked too. . . . He had to see that his family was well provided for and also that there was enough food and clothing for his slaves. Not many planters neglected their slaves, since each one represented a great deal of money. . . . The planter's wife . . . saw to it . . . that the health of her family and of the slaves was good (pages 78-79).

The only comment that can even remotely be construed as a criticism of slavery is this stark one-sentence paragraph which appears in a discussion of colonial education: "For the slave population there was no education" (page 86). There are no reasons given for this nor are the consequences of the lack of education pointed out. There is no further mention of slavery or the Negro during the colonial period or the Revolution or the early national period though in the section on Ante-Bellum America there is mention of the fact that the Northern states abolished slavery (no dates or reasons are given) and that such leaders as Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, and Henry opposed slavery (again no reasons are given).

The treatment of slavery in the section dealing with the causes of the Civil War (which is quaintly titled "WE DECIDE TO SEPARATE and then to UNITE") is as vague as it was in the earlier parts of this

¹ Rebekah R. Liebman and Gertrude A. Young, *The Growth of America*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959. This is a supplementary book for grade eight.

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