



The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism

Edward E. Baptist

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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 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. Until the Civil War, Baptist explains, the most important American economic innovations were ways to make slavery ever more profitable. Through forced migration and torture, slave owners extracted continual increases in efficiency from enslaved African Americans. Thus the United States seized control of the world market for cotton, the key raw material of the Industrial Revolution, and became a wealthy nation with global influence.

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. It forces readers to reckon with the violence at the root of American supremacy, but also with the survival and resistance that brought about slavery’s end—and created a culture that sustains America’s deepest dreams of freedom.

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