COMPANY TOWNS: THE PATRONAGE SYSTEM FROM MEDIEVAL EUROPE TO THE AMERICAN SOUTH AND BEYOND

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of The School of Continuing Studies and of The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Robert Olker, B.A.

Georgetown University Washington, D.C. May 5, 2011
COMPANY TOWNS: THE PATRONAGE SYSTEM FROM MEDIEVAL EUROPE TO THE AMERICAN SOUTH AND BEYOND

Robert Olker, B.A.

Mentor: Stefan Zimmers, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Many people assume the patronage system was a passing form of control in Medieval Europe, and the system simply vanished. This thesis argues that the patronage system moved from Medieval Europe to the American South and many of the aspects seen in Europe were able to adapt or evolve to fit the modern times. This system was built on large-scale land holdings, agrarian societies, reciprocal obligations, and a control that came from the local area without interference from any national powers. It is because of these aspects that patronage is not confined to any specific time, but has persisted to the modern day.

This paper discusses the historiography of the system of patronage found both in Medieval Europe and the American South. By comparing what is written about these systems it is possible to extrapolate the importance of patronage in these societies. Although few write about the system of patronage moving from one period to another, the descriptions used to discuss the periods have striking similarities.
In addition to discussing the similarities between the systems it is also imperative to discuss the differences. This allows us to determine whether the differences are a product of the system evolving, or whether the difference proves that an aspect is inherent to one period and not a necessity of patronage.

Finally, the paper will briefly discuss how patronage has the power to exist into modern times. While the system has mostly disappeared from the developed countries it still exists in countries that are less advanced and still have unstable national governments and an overreliance on agricultural production. This section shows the patronage system as one that has not only continued over a thousand years, but also one that has the power to continue ad infinitum.

Patronage has proven to be a deceptive system. While it no longer has the international power it once did, it has quietly remained a system that controls the lives of many people. It is this ability to quietly adapt that has allowed patronage to stay long after many thought it ended.
DEDICATION

To my parents and my family for showing me why history is important.

To Professor Stefan Zimmers and Anne Ridder for sticking with me throughout this process.

To the Library of Congress, and the libraries at Georgetown University, Clemson University, and Portland State University for having so many sources available for all of my research.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PATRONAGE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: THE POST CIVIL WAR AMERICAN SOUTH</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: HOUSING, FOOD, AND SUPPLIES: WHO OWNS A COMMUNITY?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: POPULATION DENSITY AND WORKER’S RIGHTS: A LACK OF OTHER OPTIONS</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAN SOUTH</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: CASH CROPS: EXPORTING WHAT MAKES MONEY</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT: PATRONAGE NOW</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin once wrote that, “(t)hey who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.” This was an appropriate idea to be coming from a man who had helped to start a country based on the idea of freedom. Because of this founding idea it seems counterintuitive so many people in this country sacrificed personal freedoms for a more stable life. This was the case for many people who willingly moved into mill villages across the United States, but primarily in the post-Civil War South.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, mill villages developed all across the American South. Even though there were different types of mills, the majority of these mills, which had gradually moved from the American Northeast, produced textiles. People in the American South moved from small farms to small villages to work new jobs in the mills. Residents left their rural lifestyles behind and moved into communal neighborhoods for the available jobs these villages provided. Although this experience was relatively new for the citizens of the American South, the type of life in these mill villages was all too familiar historically.

Across the American South hopeful capitalists started building textile factories. Because of the large economic impact they brought into an area, mills did
not need to be based near preexisting towns; villages arose around these new mills.¹ One example occurred when, “(o)n June 14, 1894, water was turned on the wheel of Courtney mill, furnishing power for the manufacturing process. This event marked the beginning of a new life for thousands of people who would come, work, and live in this particular mill village.”²

This event was the beginning of the small mill village of Newry, South Carolina. This mill village is relevant not because of its importance, but rather because of its lack of importance. It was just one of many mill villages starting in the American South. In fact, in an article for *The Journal of Economic History*, William Phillips said, “Newry is representative of a typical rural mill village of the southern Piedmont.”³ Mill villages in the American South were based on two main aspects. These were agricultural production and patronage. Combined, these two concepts gave mill villages a reason for their existence (agricultural production) and a system of controlling that existence (patronage). These villages sprouted up across the Southeast as people first immigrated to the United States, but the concept of

¹ “Rather, most towns arose as a result of changes in the organization of agricultural production, primarily changes in the financing and marketing of cotton.” Harold Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 333.


communal villages based around agricultural production and patronage dated back much farther. Villages based on these concepts originated during the late Roman Empire and early medieval Europe.

The term patronage is generally used when referring to medieval Europe. The view of many scholars regarding patronage is that it is a primarily European concept that slowly faded away as the Middle Ages ended. It is evident the system of patronage started in the Middle Ages did not die, but continued to evolve until the twentieth century. It even moved across the Atlantic Ocean to the American South. The control of the poor workers by the landed elites in these heavily agricultural regions continued throughout the centuries on both hidden and overt levels.

Many of the characteristics seen in mill villages in the post-Civil War American South were much like the patronage system begun in Europe. This resemblance is a result not only of similar economic, political, and agricultural institutions in place in the regions, but also of a large migration from the British Empire to the American South. Both societies were run on the premise that “(t)he contract of vassalage bound together two men who were, by definition, on different social levels.” These, along with other factors, led to the continuation of a system into the twentieth century that many historians assumed ended centuries ago. In fact, “(a)s early as the last years of the fifteenth century, cloth-mills were multiplying and

---

former corn-mills were being converted to industrial uses. “5 This means that as early as the fifteenth century villages in Europe transformed in ways similar to what people would see in the post-Civil War American South.

In order to establish that the patronage system existed into the post-Civil War American South, it is imperative to define the multiple aspects necessary for patronage. Clearly, the system in the twentieth century American South will not be an exact duplicate of that in eleventh century Norman England. While some aspects of life in medieval patronage faded as society evolved, some remained similar. These similarities show the basis of patronage throughout the centuries.

The goal of this paper is to establish a link between the patronage system of medieval Europe and the cotton mill society of the American South. These societies contain a large number of commonalities. Both of these societies were agrarian in nature and were characterized by large landed estates owned by small elites who took advantage of the decentralized government of the area.

In is also important to note that these landed elites maintained their control by using similar methodology in both societies. These social elites used the concepts of land ownership and paternalism as a method of social control that gave power to those who already had power, thereby creating a system that forced residents to stay within their predetermined caste.

In both of these societies land ownership played an important role. Landowners in the American South, many of them descendents of Europeans, made many decisions that moved the American South in a direction similar to the one seen in medieval Europe centuries before. It is these political and social decisions that led to societies based on reciprocal obligations and a paternalistic role of large landholders.

The European patronage system dates back over one thousand years. In fact some scholars date the beginning of this system as early as the height of the Roman Empire. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and where the concept of patronage started, medieval historian F.L. Ganshof wrote that “(t)he origins of medieval feudalism must be looked for in the Frankish kingdom of the Merovingians.” As this system gained a foothold across Europe, people began having lives based on working for land owners rather than providing for themselves. This change is a direct result of people living closer to one another as regional populations expanded and of the rise in power of owners of large estates. The emergence of the system of patronage is an important historical concept because “(t)he growing influence of the territorial state automatically changed the traditional

---

relation between lords and peasants, as well as the foundations on which the
authority of ecclesiastical and lay lords rested.”

The change in the “traditional relation between lord and peasants” was key in
maintaining the system seen in medieval Europe and later in America. This
changing relationship was brought about by land, which had always been necessary,
becoming equated to power as the importance of land, and therefore the importance
of those who possessed it, rose. While this system came to power by a change in
relations, it was kept in place by its ability to keep citizens in their new roles by
means of reciprocal obligations.

It is important to differentiate between what aspects of the day-to-day lives
of the peasant class were effects of the patronage system and which were effects of
the time period in which they are living. While some intricate parts of their lives
such as where to procure clothes and food are a result of the system in place, others,
such as the use of crop rotation and methods of farming, are a result of technological
advancement. It is necessary to separate these daily aspects so that the importance
of the political and social implications of the patronage system can be seen by
themselves, not through the lens of industrial advancement.

The most surprising and ironic thing about the moving of patronage to the
United States was that a nation, which prided itself on individual freedom, would
accept conditions in which they lost much of that freedom. It seems unexpected that

7 Werner Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages (Urbana, IL: University of
a country such as the United States, less than one hundred years removed from the ideals of founders such as Benjamin Franklin, would agree to sacrifice personal freedoms for the chance to live a more stable life. The answers to the seemingly unlikely movement of patronage are important to know in order to understand the rapid rise and fall of mill villages in the American South between the end of the Civil War and the end of the 20th century.

In the United States, like Europe before it, the landed elites took advantage of the lack of federal power to increase the power they held. Prior to the Civil War, landed elites in the American South had used their land primarily as plantations. After the Civil War the free work provided by slave labor was no longer available, so landowners had to find new uses for the land. When landowners began to transition to cotton mills they were able to maintain many of the social controls they had on their plantations. These societal controls, because they successfully moved from medieval Europe into the American South, show the importance of reciprocal obligations in these large-scale agricultural societies regardless of the time period or continent.

There is a direct, if surprising, relationship between the patronage system in medieval Europe and the mill villages of the American South. Not only are there similarities between the types of regional control in these areas, but there is also a direct line of succession from Europe to the American South. These include style of
governance, economic production of the areas, and population development. It is possible to see the similarities between medieval Europe and the post-Civil War American South by using a combination of primary and secondary sources. Both time periods have government documents as well as the opinions of citizens, which give an accurate depiction of the eras. It is by comparing these sources that one can begin to create an accurate assessment of the movement of the patronage system from Europe to the United States.

Many people associate the patronage system with medieval Europe. This system had its beginnings in Europe and what that system entailed, and began its evolution there. It is also important to know what “feudalism” is, as this word is often used as a catchall phrase when referring to medieval Europe and the start of the patronage system. The ideas associated with patronage and manorialism are the most correct because, “it must be admitted that the word feudalism, which was to have so great a future, was very ill-chosen.”

8 Backman notes that “despite initial appearances the medieval world and the modern world have many things in common, and by understanding the origins of contemporary phenomena we gain if not a truer than at least a more sophisticated appreciation of them….We can trace a surprising number of modern ideas, technologies, institutions, and cultural practices back to the medieval centuries.” Clifford Backman, Worlds Of Medieval Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

9 German scholar Werner Rosener agree with this by saying “(t)he broad use of the term feudalism virtually equates manorialism and feudalism.” Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages, 16.

10 Bloch, Feudal Society, xvii.
In order to show they had a basis in the same aspects it is imperative to compare and contrast the patronage systems of medieval Europe and post-Civil War American South. They will also help to show the progression of the patronage system throughout history, from its inception during medieval Europe to the present. Patronage is a common thread throughout these two periods because of the commonality seen in their ruling classes and general political systems. The controls of these regions are both the small top sections of economic pyramids. The political systems are ones that continue based on the subjugation of the lower class as a way to control the movement of individuals and products. These two societies used their natural similarities to maintain their social and cultural similarities. Small groups who controlled the land controlled both these societies. These small groups of landowners all used many of the same methods for societal control. These methods included use of land, labor rights, religion, and political decentralization. The landed in both societies were able to use similar methods of control along with the natural similarities of the agricultural nature of the two societies to create a common system of agricultural land control.

Patronage is a viable system for running a community because it relies on hierarchical control. Patronage requires that “he who should do his homage, in view of the reverence which he owes his lord, should wait upon his lord wherever he may
be found in the realm or elsewhere.”" It also dictates that this “homage ought not to be done in private, but in a public and common place before many persons in the county.”" The idea of patronage is that one person willingly and publically puts himself or herself under the control of another individual. This idea fits into both societies because of the social obligations and the paternalistic attitude found in both.

Because it is such a broad concept there is much disagreement about when the patronage system started and what it entailed. In terms of population, “the eleventh to thirteenth centuries constituted a period of pre-eminent expansion of the agrarian economy.”" This expansion of the agrarian European economies would help to lay the foundation for the expansion of the medieval patronage system in the large estates across most of Europe. This system was originally constituted in ancient Greece and Rome, and spread with the growth of the two empires. The important aspect is not the exact years of the patronage system in Europe, but what people mean when they talk about “patronage” or “feudalism,” and how the landownership and obligations associated with these terms are found in both medieval Europe and the American South.

---


12 Ibid., 27.

13 Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages*, 23.
The patronage system in Medieval Europe was developed over time in a way that incorporated local customs while evolving to meet the needs of an ever-changing continent. Because of this it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the old systems ended and the patronage system began. Therefore, the different starting times given by many scholars have more to do with what that scholar feels the term “patronage” requires, rather than actual differences seen by the different scholars when they look back to this period of European history.

The concept of patronage was first seen in the Roman and Grecian Empires. With the spread of the Roman Empire the idea of patronage was able to move into Europe. During the fall of Rome the seeds of patronage had already been planted. After the fall of Rome there was a system in place catering to the landed elites. This was a system known in the Roman Empire as latifundium. This system encouraged land owning, and the system of aristocracy that took hold after the fall of the Roman Empire allowed medieval patronage to spread in the way it is classically known.

Medieval patronage started regionally and quickly moved across Europe. It, "in its narrow sense, meaning the system of feudal and vassal institutions, was also, and to an even greater degree than feudalism in its broad sense, proper to the states born of the breakup of the Carolingian empire and the countries influenced by them."\(^{14}\) It is because it was born primarily out of one geographic location that patronage across the European continent had so many similarities from one region to

\(^{14}\) Ganshof, *Feudalism*, xvi-xvii.
another. Some scholars have written that the study of medieval patronage “reveals a very homogeneous set of values, which combined acceptance of inequality and subordination with a high degree of voluntary co-operation.”

Patronage began its spread across Europe after the end of the Roman and Germanic Empires. Without these empires and their large governments, the control of Europe reverted to a system with more local authority. With the split of these empires, the Merovingians and the Carolingians played a major role in the spread of patronage. The Merovingians were a Frankish kingdom in what is traditionally known as the Gaul region of Europe. This kingdom lasted from the fifth century until the middle of the eighth century when the Pippinid Kingdom replaced them. This Carolingian Empire, which included the reign of Charlemagne, lasted in Europe until the tenth century. Although these two kingdoms were gone before patronage reached its height, they were instrumental in laying the groundwork across Europe for the system to fall into place.

An important stimulus to the creation and maintaining of patronage is the absence of a dominant regional government and the presence of a more authoritative local authority. In fact, patronage was “characterized in the first instance by the decay of royal authority.” This worked because the idea of a kingdom in medieval

---


Europe “was very different from what it would be today; in particular, it was much less comprehensive.”

During the creation and spread of patronage across Europe, there were no powerful nation-state governments, only “an infinity of tiny pieces.”

This lack of viable nation-states allowed the authority in Europe to stay on a more local basis than if there had been any powerful regional governments in place. Patronage thrived as a result of this power vacuum.

1066 is an important year in the history of patronage because “in this year William came and conquered England.” Normandy was the area of what is now known as France directly across the English Channel from England. Viking invaders coming from Scandinavia in the early tenth century conquered Normandy, giving the Normans a unique blend of patronage from continental Europe and Scandinavia. The Norman invasion allowed a variation of the European patronage system to make its way into England. This invasion fundamentally changed the way England operated. Before the Norman Invasion “(m)unicipal growth or even aspirations we should scarcely expect to find among the slow-moving Anglo-Saxons, especially as the impulse given to it abroad by feudal tyranny was entirely

---

17 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 408.


absent in England.”

The movement into larger town or village settings began as a result of the Norman Invasion.

In England, from the early tenth century until the Norman Invasion, all land owners had theoretical obligations which “included labour on public works, on royal villas and palaces and on churches. They were also required to service in the military. “These services, as many of the extant charters insist, were obligatory on the whole people, were never excused, and were therefore described as ‘common’.” Some kings enforced these obligations strictly while others took a more lax approach. The system of obligations seen in pre-Norman England was different from that in continental Europe as a result of the West Saxon control of England as opposed to the Roman control of continental Europe.

After taking control over England King William decided that he should know what it was that he possessed. He enforced a rigid system of obligations. In order to detail what he was due and what he was owed King William “(b)rought the whole of his far-seeing measures to completion by dispatching from his side his wisest men in

---


21 Ibid.


23 Ibid., 69.
circuit throughout the realm. The latter made a careful survey of the whole land, in
woods and pastures and meadows, and arable lands also.”24 This occurred in 1085
and was to determine “what or how much everybody had who was occupying land in
England, in land or cattle, and how much money it was worth.”25 The Domesday
Book does not mark the beginning of the patronage system in Norman England, but
does show how the Norman Invasion started the movement of patronage from
Continental Europe.

Unlike the start of the patronage system in England, the end was a process
difficult to pinpoint. Because the perceived end was a slow transition across the
European continent, it is extremely difficult to say precisely when patronage was no
the system of favor for medieval Europeans. Therefore, the best way to see when
scholars feel the patronage system ended is to view the endings of patronage
chronologically. This is because Normandy and Norman England offer the most
integrated patronage networks and a similar cultural milieu. It is because of these
integrated networks that the Norman system became the model for future patronage
systems. Necessary portions of Norman patronage, such as paternalism and
agricultural systems, were similar to those in the American South. These show the
movement of patronage from one time period onto the next one.


25 Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds., Anglo-
Saxon Chronicle, 161.
Although this section will focus specifically on the patronage system of Norman England, it will also consider regional differences across Europe. Because large majorities of people arriving to the United States came from the United Kingdom, especially in the heavily Scotch-Irish American South, the patronage system in place in England after the Norman Conquest of 1066 is the best system of to study for its relation to that in place during post-Civil War American South.

It is necessary to discuss how a large number of academics have written about how the patronage system slowly faded away as an economic system across the European continent. While there are differences in the theories these scholars are advancing one of the similarities between most of them is that in general they only look at the patronage system in its exact form, not as a system that was able to change as a result of society advancing. Many historians wrongly end the system of patronage in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. However, it is the evolution of the patronage system that facilitated its migration into the American South. Most academics that have written on this topic have missed this connection.

Patronage in general, and social replication in particular, continued from Europe into the American South. Citizens of the area, as well as the area as a whole, still felt the effects of the Civil War for decades after the war was over. Not only were the citizens of the American South affected; the entire workforce in the area felt the effects of the nation’s slave population being freed.
The next chapter traces the crops grown in patronage systems. This will focus on not just the agricultural systems in place in those regions, but the specific cash crops associated with the area. This section will focus on the crops of Europe and the American South, and why they grew what they did. This land was not suited development of steel mills and coalmines like those in the Pennsylvania and West Virginia region.

In addition to the crops of the regions, an important factor of the patronage system is the political system in place. Both of these regions had very little control outside the local authority. The population density and the rights of workers in the areas were both very important to the patronage system’s being able to succeed in a region. It is important to focus on these characteristics to show why a person would choose to live in the patronage system. Both medieval Europe and the American South focused on agriculture. There were few employment options not related to agriculture. Accordingly, many of the policy decisions made by these local authorities were made with agricultural policy in mind. The development of these policies led to company towns moving from the American Northeast to the American South in a relatively short amount of time.

Also covered will be the specifics of life in mill villages. It is important to show the lives of mill workers because it is these citizens who were not only the most affected by the patronage system in place, but also it was by their acquiescence that the system grew and flourished. Residents of the mill villages maintained lives
that compared on many levels those of the peasant class of medieval Europe, lives that showed similarities between the two time periods. This will include not only the day-to-day lives of residents of the mill villages, but also how much of that day-to-day life is controlled by the owners of the mill. Lives of the workers were controlled not only generally, but also specifically. This control included, but was not limited to: stores, doctors, dentists, schools, police force, and the homes of the mill workers themselves. The mill owners maintained a systematic approaching to controlling mill villages. Their social control, like the medieval patronage before it, was pervasive across the region.

After discussing all of the issues relating to the patronage systems in Europe and the American South, it will be important to see how those two systems compare to one another. Obviously, even though the situations are similar, they are not exactly the same. This comparison is important because showing how this patronage system has evolved can help us to understand not only why it persists, but also where and when we might see this system show up next.

Combined, they should show why an idea such as the patronage system has survived for over a thousand years while the international community has evolved. They should also show why citizens in a country founded on individual freedom, would choose to give up some of those “inalienable” rights for the chance to live a more stable life.
Oswald Spengler once wrote that “(t)he peasant is the eternal man, independent of every culture that ensconces itself in the cities. He precedes it, he outlives it.” It is this common man, this “eternal peasant,” that serves as the basis for the patronage system, for as long as there have been peasant workers, there have been people to control them. The constant resiliency of this peasant class has allowed for a system such as patronage to also remain throughout the centuries.

Between the two societies, these peasants were both subject to the controls put in place by the landed class. These peasants were forced in these roles on the low end of their agricultural societies and had very little recourse as a result of there not being a strong government in place to protect them.

---

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PATRONAGE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Medieval Europe was an era defined by a system of patronage and paternalism based in an agricultural society. While the system arguably began in the fusion of the Germanic and Roman worlds, the importance of patronage in medieval Europe was a result of its ability to adapt across the continent. This system relied on the control of local landowners and expanded due to a dearth of strong regional leaders. Historians have used several different words describe the agricultural system based on reciprocal obligations seen in the region. Among these

1 When many historians “developed the idea of different stages of history marked by differences in political economy, the agricultural stage…was represented primarily by the middle ages, the age of feudal government.” Susan Reynolds, Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 7-8.

2 George Burton Adams, “Anglo-Saxon Feudalism,” The American Historical Review 7, no. 1 (October, 1901): 11. George Adams writes that what is considered “feudalism” is actually a number of different systems from medieval Europe. Adams’ work shows that the idea of patronage is not specific to one group of people and can therefore move through the years without losing what makes it patronage.

3 Griffiths gives a good example of this by writing, that “England was ruled by Norman dukes and Angevin counts.” Ralph A. Griffiths, “The English Realm and Dominions and the King’s Subjects in the Later Middle Ages,” in Aspects of Late Medieval Government and Society, ed. J.G. Rowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 85; This was also a result of a lack of power from above a local level. G.O. Sayles writes that “(t)he early kings were undoubtedly stronger in prestige than in actual power.” G.O. Sayles, The Medieval Foundations of England (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1961), 118.
are patronage, feudalism, manorialism, and seigneurialism. Because historians have described this European system in so many terms, it is imperative to show how all of these phrases describe a system that has spread across Europe, and even extended beyond it. The best way to do this is by examining the writings of prominent scholars of European history such as Georges Duby, Marc Bloch, Henri Pirenne, as well as others. Their research shows what similarities can be seen across the European system of patronage.

Patronage would become a system that relied on the past, but changed according to the needs of the present time. Patronage relied on a small class of large landowners with large political control. Using this control landowners created a feeling of paternalistic dependence in their working class. This paternalistic dependence is one of the major factors connecting medieval Europe to the American South.

---

4 Sen writes about how the economies of a region can change based on the regions needs “because the economy creates nothing in vacuum, nor through merely economic agencies. Its influence is often indirect, and works through the mediation of politics, law, religion, and many other not strictly economic dimensions.” Because economies can be fluid it is possible for this method to move from Europe to the American South. Asok Sen, “The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,” Economic and Political Weekly 19, No. 30 (July 28, 1984): 51; Bloch echoes this statement saying, patronage “a type of social organization marked by a special quality in human relationships, expressed itself not only in the creation of new institutions; it imparted its own colouring to what it received from the past, as if passing it through a prism, and transmitted it to succeeding ages.” Marc Bloch, Feudal Society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1961), 229.
Medieval Europe was based on a divide between the landed elites ruling the land and the peasant class they controlled.\textsuperscript{5} In Europe the peasant class worked for the landed elites as their only means of survival.\textsuperscript{6} These elites would often receive their land from the royalty of an area as a reward for support or military service. The roles had an added importance because moving from one of these classes of society to another was almost impossible. These defined roles were one of the primary characteristics of the Middle Ages; which was “an era of peasants who worked the land; an age of warriors who were their lords.”\textsuperscript{7} The rewards of landowning and obligations of living on the land of another kept the two groups of citizens in a cycle that further exacerbated the paternalistic role of a landowner. As a result of the presence of these well-defined roles, the patronage system in Europe

\textsuperscript{5} Georges Duby writes that there were three classes of citizens in medieval Europe. Of these classes, “first, there were those in possession of ‘authority,’ responsible for waging spiritual warfare; second, possessors of ‘power,’ responsible for waging temporal warfare; and third, all those…whose only right was to keep silent, and whose only duty was to obey.” This classification of citizens is debatable, but it shows the structures of this period, not only of the roles maintained in everyday life, but in the importance of having defined roles such as the ruling, military class, the ecclesiastical class, and the working class. Georges Duby, \textit{The Three Orders} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 80.

\textsuperscript{6} “The peasantry was sinking toward serfdom for essentially political and social, rather than economic reasons.” David Nicholas, \textit{The Medieval West, 400-1450} (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1973), 93.

came about in “an age when the links of lord and man, and between the men of a single lord, were strong.”

Landowning in the middle ages was based on a combination of legal and historical factors. The general acceptance of this system in these communities gave the obligations therein a higher degree of justification and legitimacy. In addition to owning the soil, the estate rulers had a paternalistic role over the peasant class on their land. Paternalism and the idea of quid pro quo was used as a validation and legitimization for the domination of land ownership and political authority on the local level. The concept of protection was very important in this period. Often, medieval citizens felt this obligation towards protection went back to Roman times,


9 In the patronage system “rights over the soil were divided: the manorial lord held the direct ownership of the soil (dominium directum) while the peasant held the rights of usage (dominium utile).” Werner Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 16.

10 Bloch divides these duties into three categories. They had to “ensure the spiritual salvation of his people by pious foundations and by the protection of the true faith; to defend them from foreign foes… and lastly to maintain justice and internal peace.” Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 408-09.

11 Across Europe “(t)he protective relationship set up by one free man over another was called in Latin *patrocinium*.” F.L. Ganshof, *Feudalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 5.
and was not just a regional idea. Landowners took their role of protection seriously for these reasons. First, was that only in a system in which all citizens had clearly defined roles such as landowner or working class “could freely exist the various dependent relations which had long since been established between peasant workers and landowners.” Second, was that if the landowners failed to meet their obligations towards the peasant class, those same peasants would theoretically be under no obligations to perform their obligations of farming for the lords. While this likely would not have been plausible, maintaining the sense of paternalism kept up the appearance that both groups had defined roles. Being reciprocal allowed patronage a sense of fairness, even though it the obligations of the two groups were not equal. In order for patronage to function as a system based on reciprocal

---

12 Backman writes that this helped to give residents of this time a “collective cultural identity.” Clifford Backman, *Worlds Of Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3; Reynolds agrees with Backman and writes “the same values that held the rest of society together, reinforced by the need of solidarity against inferiors and outsiders.” Because these people are already conditioned into thinking of themselves as a small group it is not difficult to turn those feelings into familial ones which require a land owner to take a paternalistic role. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, 476.

13 The roles of landlords and peasants were determined by custom, a very important idea to those in medieval Europe and later the American South. “Because social norms still stressed the validity of custom as well as the duties of obedience, both rulers and subjects, like lawyers, tended to claim the sanction of ancient custom and to moralize about the duties of loyal and grateful subjects.” Ibid., 478.


15 Richard Grabowski writes that “that manorial agriculture was not efficient, even though it persisted for centuries in Europe and England.” However, the fact this
obligations these obligations do not have to be equal, they need only to be present and accepted. Landowners rarely have obligations equal to those of the working class, but the fact that they have obligations to the workers gives those workers a sense that they have some type of importance.

Although much has been written about medieval Europe and the rise of the patronage system, until recently there has not been much written about how the patronage system affected the European peasants. Some research has been done on this subject, but it has been a very small amount due to the scarcity of information available. While there was much written about the upper class citizens and the royalty of the Middle Ages, the peasants of the Middle Ages were treated as little more than an afterthought. While many modern day historians attempt to write about the plight of the poor during the Middle Ages, little was written about them during their time, likely because very few of the literate class of citizens during the time cared about them.

It is therefore important to learn about the medieval peasants by extrapolating information from the wills and the deeds of the people associated with the peasant farmers during this time period. It is important to discuss the peasant class of medieval Europe because it was these people who were most intricately involved with patronage. While large estate owners and royalty were involved with the

system persisted for so many centuries showed how effective it was. Its efficacy was based in the power and paternalistic role it allowed the landowners as much as it was about money. Richard Grabowski, “Economic Development and Feudalism,” The Journal of Developing Areas 25, No. 2 (January 1991): 179.
patronage system in a more supervisory role, it was the peasant class who felt the results of this system on a daily basis.

Patronage requires a combination of little to no state power with a large amount of power on a local level. This is usually associated with an agricultural system that allows a landowner to be the only authority figure in an extended area.

It is safe to start off by agreeing that patronage “may be regarded as a body of institutions creating and regulating the obligations of obedience and service…on the part of a free man (the vassal) towards another free man (the lord), and the obligations of protection and maintenance on the part of the lord with regard to his vassal.”

This prevalence of obligations was important to the system because “with the spread of feudal tenures and the manorial system in Carolingian times, free persons became increasingly subject to feudal and manorial lords.” It was not because of force that “many free men willingly subordinated themselves to a powerful man.” These men were subjecting themselves to a lord because it was, based on the agrarian economy around them, the best chance to provide a better life

---

16 Ganshof, *Feudalism*, xvi.

17 Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages*, 13.

for themselves and their families.\textsuperscript{19} The new importance of large farms was vital to everyone across the European continent.\textsuperscript{20}

Even though the idea of capitalism as it is currently defined was not as prevalent in medieval Europe as it is today, there was still an economically elite class of citizens.\textsuperscript{21} These landowners did not have a large amount of monetary currency, but were able to procure many of the items that they needed through trade.\textsuperscript{22} This was the agrarian concept known as land tenure.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Ross Collins writes “(t)he collapse of organized government during the later Carolingian epoch and the inability of monarchs to afford protection to the individual landowner, either against his more powerful neighbor against the marauding expeditions of the Northmen, gave rise to Feudalism.” This not only shows the lack of power from any level above the local one, but also shows the importance of the duty of providing protection by the landowners. Ross William Collins, \textit{A History of Medieval Civilization in Europe} (Boston: The Atheneum Press, 1936), 221; Nicholas echoes this statement, writing “agriculture continued as a form of production, and rural life even developed elements of unwonted prosperity, but the new commercial community, the town, reduced the neighboring villages, or manors, to a state of subordination.” Nicholas, \textit{The Medieval West, 400-1450}, 61.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{20} There was an importance of large farms because “change in political and social organization was no doubt partly a response to changes in the agrarian economy.” Duby, \textit{The Early Growth of the European Economy}, 157.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} In addition to being characterized by an economically elite class, this period marked “the beginning of industrial specialization which has gone on to our day as a giant force in production.” This shows that not only was there an elite class similar to modern day, but also the beginning of a system that continued into the American South. C.G. Crump, \textit{The Legacy of the Middle Ages} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 435.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Because landed elites already traded items produced on their land for items designed simply to show their opulence there was already a proto-capitalism present in medieval Europe. Because of this Wallerstein is wrong in his theory that “the so-
\end{flushleft}
Because of the agrarian nature of the economy, “(a) man’s condition was now determined by his relation to the land, which was owned by a minority of lay and ecclesiastical proprietors, below whom a multitude of tenants were distributed within the framework of the great estates. To possess land was at the same time to possess freedom and power.” Landownership also brought with it a position of political authority. These connections, both exclusive to the elite, increased their importance in society. The members of the peasant class were willingly putting themselves in a subservient position because that reliance on the landowner was the only way in which peasants could procure enough land to support themselves and

called reciprocal nexus we identify with feudalism, the exchange of protection for labor services, constitutes a feudal mode of production only when it is determinative of other social relations. But once such a ‘nexus’ is contained within a capitalist world-economy, its autonomous reality disappears. It becomes rather one of the many forms of bourgeois employment of proletarian labor to be found in a capitalist mode of production, a form that is maintained, expanded or diminished in relation to its profitability on the market.” Immanuel Wallerstein, “From Feudalism to Capitalism: Transition or Transitions?” Social Forces 55, No. 2 (December 1976): 278-79; Duby writes that the reason for this economic power could be “termed ‘landlordship’, because it stemmed from possession not of people but of land.” Duby, The Early Growth of the European Economy, 175.

Reynolds agrees with the high importance that comes along with being a large landowner. She writes, “(n)or, in a society like that of the medieval west, which rested on a settled, agricultural base, can power over persons be significantly distinguished from power over the place where they live and the means of their livelihood.” Reynolds, Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300, 337.

Henri Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe (New York: Harvest Books, 1936), 12; Helena Hamerow agrees with this idea, writing, “(t)he formalization of territories was of course key to the formation of early kingdoms.” Helena Hamerow, Early Medieval Settlements (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100.
their families. Peasants would receive the usufruct of the land, while the lords would retain imminent domain. This subservience was quickly becoming an intrinsic part of the patronage system. Although it was rare for a person to move up in the medieval European society, it was possible for them to move down, and once they moved down they were often stuck in that caste-like position.

A key element allowing patronage to flourish is the lack of a strong central government. This allows landowners to maintain their status as the most powerful person in a community. An example of the limited ability of governments during this period was shown in the area of lawmaking. Laws in a majority of Europe did not come from a large state government, but came from smaller areas in which “traditional law reflect [sic] the societies in which the communities originated.”

This local control would be repeated in the patronage system of the American South.

25 Collins mentions the importance of reciprocal obligations in this time period. He writes “The obligations, both personal and real, that bound surf and villein alike to the lord were a fundamental part of the manorial system.” Collins, A History of Medieval Civilizations in Europe, 251.

26 Duby wrote that “(t)his system was founded on the principle of inequality and obedience, on the necessarily hierarchical relationship between those who…set the example and gave the orders, and those who…carried them out.” Duby, The Three Orders, 354-55.

27 Even though the peasants who had voluntarily gone under the protection of estate owning lords were “(o)stensibly free, they were in fact imprisoned in a whole network of services which imposed severe limitations on their independence.” Duby, The Early Growth of the European Economy, 34.

28 Reynolds, Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300, 12.
The power in the patronage system is concentrated at a more regional level. Landowners wielded great power. In addition to limited or no state government, this system “was also characterized by the institution of lordship.”\(^{29}\) This is because “(f)rom the economic point of view the most striking and characteristic institution of this civilisation is the great estate.”\(^{30}\) The landed elites obviously did not protect the peasant class purely out of altruistic motives.\(^{31}\) The importance of a landowner was linked directly to the amount of agricultural production his land maintained. Landowners knew that a protected working class would be more productive and therefore more profitable than a one that was constantly worrying about its own safety.\(^{32}\) This process of providing community residents with common services would later be one of the cornerstones of mill villages in the American South.

\(^{29}\) Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 168.

\(^{30}\) Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, 8.

\(^{31}\) The patronage system “stimulated growth by deflecting seigneurial greed towards the quest for higher manorial profits.” Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 93.

\(^{32}\) Bois agrees with this, writing the creation of communal identity, as defined by the landed elites, was beneficial to all because “here village responsibility served individual enterprises, protecting them from external threats and sustaining them by providing common services.” Guy Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 175.
One of the reasons the patronage system was started in Europe was to reward the military class. As the importance of a military grew, the creation of the patronage system was in part to reward these warriors for their military service and protection. Having a group of paid soldiers signaled the end of militias consisting primarily of citizen soldiers. Soldiers grew in power as society divided into three parts. These soldiers not only increased the importance of military, but also by having land given to them, increased the number of landowners in medieval Europe. As the patronage system became more popular across Europe, and the value of the warriors and vassals grew, their value was “ever more sharply distinguished from the ordinary free peasant, now of less and less military value and declining towards servitude.” Peasants who had once been on their own now had to move to a life of working for lords, as their value as free men would not be enough to sustain themselves and their families.

Because a main aspect of patronage is its ability to adapt and evolve, the time in which it comes to a region is less important. It is because this system slowly

---

33 These three orders were religious leaders “responsible for waging spiritual warfare,” soldiers “responsible for waging temporal warfare,” and a peasant class consisting of “all those who did not carry the sword…whose only right was to keep silent.” Duby, The Three Orders, 80.


35 In fact, Bloch postulates that, “these generations of men had no conscious desire to create new social forms, nor were they aware of doing so.” Bloch, Feudal Society, 148.
encapsulates a region that it is difficult to place exactly when it appears. One of the earliest times in which signs of patronage began appearing in the eighth century. In the last parts of this century there were many landowners, resulting in the resurgence in the importance of agriculture. It was at the very end of the century that Charlemagne decided to combine the German and Roman regions.\(^{36}\) In the ninth century patronage expanded its reach and many people were moving towards lives in communities.\(^{37}\)

Whether or not we can pinpoint an exact date when patronage began in Europe, the movement of the Holy Roman Empire following the fall of the Carolingian Empire exacerbated this rise.\(^{38}\) It is during the ninth century that the

\(^{36}\) Ganshof feels that “There can be no doubt that the proportion of vassals to the total number of free men was steadily increasing during the second half of the eighth and throughout the whole of the ninth century.” Ganshof, *Feudalism*, 21; Henri Pirenne agrees with Ganshof, writing that “(i)t is quite plain, from such evidence as we possess, that from the end of the eighth century Western Europe had sunk back into a purely agricultural state.” Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, 7.

\(^{37}\) Duby writes that the manorial system “seems to have spread further in the ninth century,” and “underwent during the course of the century developments that distinctly altered the way it worked.” He also writes that, “during the decades before and after the first millennium, we can observe within the main body of Europe the features of a new ordering of human relations.” Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 88, 90, 157; Susan Reynolds says that based on historical records, “there seems to be no doubt that between 900 and about 1150 a significant proportion of the rural population moved into new walled settlements.” Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe*, 900-1300, 105.

\(^{38}\) With the fall of the Carolingian Empire “(p)riveate ties now increased in number” and “that these ties of dependence spread through all ranks of
spread of the Holy Roman Empire across a large portion of Europe allowed their ideas and customs to quickly be disseminated. This movement into cities is evidence that many began to see importance in the protection provided by landowners. It is likely with the rise of the Holy Roman Empire from the end of the eighth century into the ninth century that one can see patronage beginning in Europe. It is this period’s reliance on agriculture and societal roles that allows the systems of obligations associated with patronage to strengthen. The spread of this Empire allowed many of the customs that began as traditions to have a place in the legal structure of communities across the continent. Regardless of when it began patronage had completely taken over the continent and changed the lives of all involved.

society.” Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 160-61; Because of the importance of both the Merovingians and the Carolingians, “(t)he expansion and consolidation of the manorial system between the ninth and the twelfth centuries was the culmination of developments which had their origin in the heart of the Frankish Empire.” Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages*, 214.

39 Crump shows how agriculture shaped the growth of local economies in Europe. He writes “agriculture continued as a form of production, and rural life even developed elements of unwonted prosperity, but the new commercial community, the town, reduced the neighboring villages, or manors, to a state of subordination.” Crump, *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, 435.

40 Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 60. Duby sees the beginning of the patronage system at 1016, but the argument Duby makes here is weak, because it relies on waiting to see the change in legal documents rather than in less formal documents.

41 The obligation to accept that the patronage system was becoming an important aspect of European life came about because “inside the framework of
The beginning of the patronage system as a whole is difficult to place to an exact time historically, but it is much easier to pinpoint exactly when the patronage system made its way to England. Normandy was a fief in France that was given to Vikings in the early tenth century. It combined many Scandinavian aspects with the typical patronage system seen in the rest of continental Europe. It was this invasion by the Normans from what is now France that introduced the patronage system to England, a system that would later move from England to the United States. While the patronage system seen in Normandy was dissimilar to the one seen in pre-Norman England, it appears that after the Norman Invasion, English citizens quickly adapted to the new system.


43 Allen Brown agrees, stating, in a way that likely oversimplifies and ignores much continuity, that “England and France in the ninth and tenth centuries were set upon divergent courses and in England the Old World, Germanic and pre-feudal, survived until 1066, when it went down before the New.” Brown, *Origins of English Feudalism*, 94; Marc Bloch also agrees, saying that while England had many traditions predating the eleventh century, “(t)he Norman Conquest, which brought about an almost complete change in the ownership of manors, upset these arrangements and simplified them.” Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 270.

44 Bloch speculates that “(t)he action of Norman law, the frequent use of its terminology, furthered the resemblance to French institutions.” Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, 90; In fact, the level of French influence in England was so great, that, “(o)f all European countries, England was certainly, around the
As with the beginning of the patronage system in Europe, it is difficult to determine when it began to lose its importance. Because saying when a system loses its dominance is often speculative by nature, the dates given vary greatly. This degree of variance is a sign that patronage did not end, but rather changed and adapted. As early as the twelfth century the elements of patronage began to change.\textsuperscript{45} The change in patronage into the thirteenth century and through the fifteenth century allowed the system to adapt and exist in the centuries leading up to the Industrial Revolution.\textsuperscript{47}

There has been much debate regarding whether patronage was able to transition to, and work within capitalism. Its endurance can be seen through the beginning of the thirteenth century, the one where relations of hereditary dependence had assumed the closest form to French serfdom.” Bloch, \textit{Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages}, 89.

\textsuperscript{45} Duby feels that “in the last quarter of the twelfth century, an initial erosion of primitive economic attitudes can be discerned in rural society.” He writes that “(a)fter 1180 the profit motive steadily undermined the spirit of largess,” but until that period of the late twelfth century, “agriculture had been the main driving force behind all development; henceforth it became an auxiliary.” Duby, \textit{The Early Growth of the European Economy}, 268, 270.

\textsuperscript{46} Ganshof writes, while “(f)eudal institutions lasted in western Europe to the end of the Ancien Regime…from the end of the thirteenth century they ceased in western Europe to be the most fundamental element in the structure of society.” This does not indicate the end of reciprocal bonds, but merely their change from “feudal” to one based on a newer economic system. Ganshof, \textit{Feudalism}, 168.

\textsuperscript{47} Pirenne, \textit{Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe}, 67. Pirenne argues the patronage system ended as people began making more profits from their work. This argument is valid only if you define patronage by the absence of capitalism, not if you define it by its agrarian paternalism.
abundance of capitalistic societies still controlled by reciprocal bonds in an agrarian society. The profiteering of capitalism did not kill the patronage system, as some have suggested, but slowly turned it into one based not on buying military protection, but a system based on procuring capital. Both had capitalistic tendencies, with the latter simply being the most similar to modern day capitalism. It is this capitalistic idea of patronage that allowed the system to evolve past the simple owning of fiefs and thrive into the post-Civil War American South. While many look for the end of patronage in medieval Europe, the truth is this system has yet to end. A large majority of the signs scholars point to regarding the end of

---

48 Henri Pirenne advances the idea that estate owners did not transition to the new capital/free worker system, but then writes that the new types of villages, ones based on paying free workers for their services, were primarily run by men who owned one or more estates. Pirenne first writes, “we have already seen that the idea of profit was completely foreign to the patriarchal organisation of the great estate.” Then, however, he states that owners of great estates began enticing men to move to their new towns that were based on the work of free peasants “by offering… the most advantageous material and personal conditions.” In the end, it appears that Pirenne goes right to the edge of saying that the patronage system evolved, but then backs away from that thought. Ibid., 67-8, 70-1.

49 Bois, The Crisis of Feudalism, 285. Bois is also the scholar who comes the closest to saying that patronage did not disappear, but simply turned into a capitalistic system. Bois writes about how the system still relied on agrarian production and the working class was still under the control of the landowners.

50 Bloch writes that “in the agrarian system of Europe there is one really striking transformation…from about the beginning of the 15th century up to the early years of the 19th was “disappearance of communal obligations.” This shows that the agricultural basis for a paternal system stayed in Europe, but neglects the obligations shown in the American South, obligations which will be shown in a later chapter. Marc Bloch, Land and Work In Mediaeval Europe (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 49.
patronage are simply examples of patronage adapting to fit with the new society around it. As with the beginning of patronage in Europe, it is not important to look for the date when patronage ended, because that date does not exist.

Because patronage was a system that derived power from communities rather than nation-states, it sustained regional differences even though it was derived mainly from Carolingian Europe. This basis on a lower level of government meant that the system was more susceptible to small changes. Because of this patronage did not always remain the same. This continuous change allowed the system of patronage to become engrained in the mindsets and actions of many world citizens. It is these remains that are the evidence of the patronage system evolving. Patronage evolved from a paternalistic system designed to increase land holdings and power to a paternalistic system designed into increase monetary power. As all available land began to be taken, power came from successfully managing that land. No longer

51 “Toward the end of the Middle Ages it underwent profound modifications. Apparently, the same was so of all the institutions that made up the so-called ‘feudal’ society.” Bloch, Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages, 189; Bois questions whether the new system is solely capitalism, or the changing of the patronage system to fit the needs of a changing society. He writes “the penetration of the market economy and the rise of agrarian individualism prepared a soil propitious to the later development of capitalism.” Bois, The Crisis of Feudalism, 352-53.

52 Ganshof says patronage “has left behind it many legacies—vestigial remains, one might almost call them—in our methods of behaviour and thought and feeling.” Ganshof, Feudalism, 170.
would a soldier given land be powerful simply because he owned that land. He
would have to use that land to make money.

While simply owning land was in itself not a sign of political power, the
continuation of agrarian society helped the evolution of patronage. Landowners
saw that they could use their land to produce goods that others would buy. This
evolution meant that landowners could not maintain power merely by collecting rent
from their workers; they had to also exploit their landholdings.

Control over the working poor was a part of patronage that stayed consistent
as the system evolved. In most areas workers had seigniorial obligations. These
obligations, in some form or another would remain a part of patronage into the
American South.

Because patronage had already started as a system that was able to move
across Europe it showed the capacity to be resilient. The system of reciprocal
obligations based on agrarian landholdings proved beneficial across Europe not only
because there was a large amount of land, but because it kept the power in the hands

53 It is H.W. Grady, writing about the landowners in the American South that
directly compares their society to that of Medieval Europe. He writes that the
American South “was a peculiar society. Almost feudal in its splendor, it was
almost patriarchal in its simplicity.” While he uses the vague word “feudal,” he sees
that the paternal and agrarian aspects are integral to both of these societies. H.W.
Grady, “The New South,” speech on December 22, 1886, quoted in The New York
Ledger, December 28, 1886.

54 In Europe “(a)ll were burdened with labour services and dues (usually in
kind) for the profit of the lord.” Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval
Europe, 61.
of the economic and political elite. These people wanted to retain their power and continuing this system would be an easy way to make that happen. It’s perceived power ebbed and flowed, but its impact was continuously felt across the continent of Europe during the Middle Ages.
CHAPTER THREE
THE POST CIVIL WAR AMERICAN SOUTH

The Courtenay Mill opened in upstate of South Carolina in 1893. It is not surprising to learn that William Courtenay was the son of a man, Edward Courtenay, who emigrated from Ireland as a boy. In fact, “tradition holds that Mr. Courtenay selected this particular site for his plant and named it Newry because it reminded him of his ancestral home in Newry, Ireland.”\(^1\) A comparison of a mill village in South Carolina and a town in Ireland shows clearly that many of the characteristics in nineteenth century mill villages originated in medieval Europe. These mill villages across the American South consistently retained the paternalistic aspects seen in previous agrarian societies. The basis of both of these societies was the idea of reciprocal obligations between the peasant class and the landed elites.

The Newry mill represented a microcosm of mill life in the American South. This mill had specific examples of many generally occurring mill village practices. Matty Evatt, who not only worked in the Newry mill, but also worked and had friends in several nearby mills is not only a direct link to these mill villages, but also serves as a method to see how these practices not only affected people on a regional level, but on an individual level. There are many people from this period with similar

stories, and therefore as Newry is a microcosm of mill life in the American South, Evatt is a microcosm of the “everyman” idea espoused by Spengler.

The results of the Civil War devastated the American South. The North also felt the impact of the Civil War, but its effect was not as obvious as it would prove to be in the South. Not only did the war cause a large number of deaths, but it also affected the region physically, economically, and governmentally. These major changes were the dominant factors in shaping the new direction the American South would take. The needs of the mill industries heavily shaped this new direction in the century after the Civil War.

Physically, the Civil War affected a significant portion of the South. Battles completely destroyed large areas of land, and Sherman’s March to the Sea cut a noticeable hole into the Southern landscape all the way to Savannah, Georgia. These vast expanses of inhospitable land severely impacted the viability of a region once defined by its agricultural production.

The Civil War caused a large amount of economical disarray in the American South. During the war the Confederate government spent a large amount of its available money. Moreover, Northern blockades of Southern ports affected the

---

2 James Scherer agrees with this multileveled change, saying that “The South is beginning to change, however not only politically, but socially—profoundly and rapidly so.” James Scherer, *Cotton As a World Power* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1916), 317.

capital coming into the South. Because the economic leaders of the South had a vested interest in maintaining and increasing their economic control of the region, these blockades caused the region to reduce its agricultural exports radically in comparison to that before the Civil War.

In addition to the substantial amount of money lost by the American South during the Civil War, another economic loss was even larger. With slavery outlawed in the United States of America, the post-Civil War American South lost a large number of workers who had cost slave owners much less than their true worth. The freeing of the slaves in America meant that many companies and individuals that relied on slave labor would have to start paying workers much closer to their actual economic value. While the amount paid to these newly freed Americans was still much lower than their worth, it was larger than that being paid while the practice of slavery was still legal. Combined, the increase of free market labor, agricultural depression in the South, and the boom of industry in the American North created a large dichotomy between the two regions. Therefore, the South could not rely on advancing in the same manner as the North, and would have to look back historically for an economic model which they could make work for their region.

---


5 “The adjustment to free labor was but one of the many problems that had to be solved if new crops were to be planted and if destroyed or neglected businesses rebuilt.” Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers*, 245.
Just as these newly freed slaves had a profound impact on the economic structure of the American South, so did they impact the changes going on in the Southern government. Even though it was not rapid, African-Americans in the American South transitioned from an era in which they were seen primarily as property, to one in which they were seen as American citizens, albeit citizens who for the next one hundred years had severely limited rights and almost no legal powers.

Even though newly freed slaves were the obvious group affected by the end of the Civil War, the poor white community also changed considerably. Many of these people lived on farms and spent their time picking cotton and cutting wood.\textsuperscript{6} Although these people were poor before the Civil War began, after the war their waged declined as a result of the influx of new workers.\textsuperscript{7} This meant that even people running farms would need second or third jobs to continue providing for their families.\textsuperscript{8} With these poor farmers working two or three jobs to survive, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Matty Evatt, \textit{Personal Interview With Author}, 31 March 2010. According to Mattie Evatt, a mill employee who lived and worked in multiple mill villages, in the early part of the twentieth century even people such as postmen would need to make money running a farm to survive in the poor economy.
\item “In every town through the South, there were large groups of idle men and women with no opportunity for employment. If the South were to live, to rise above her present level, indeed if she were not to sink to still lower depths, work must be found for these idle hands.” M.D.C. Crawford, \textit{The Heritage of Cotton} (New York: Fairchild Publishing Company, 1948), 169.
\item Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
prospect of moving to a mill village, even to work upwards of sixty or seventy hours a week, seemed very appealing.

Although the Civil War affected the American South in many ways, the Southern solution for all of these issues was the same. After the Civil War the South focused on what it had; land. Political leaders began to focus on rebuilding the South by rebuilding the agricultural economy. Because of this agricultural focus, the American South not only began to regain its footing, but the landed elites who previously controlled the region from their plantations not only recovered but expanded their paternalistic control.

Although the focus on mills and textile production was a newer concept, the leaders in the region in most regards simply figured out a new way to continue many older aspects. The “New South” relied heavily on agricultural production, a weak

---

9 Melton McLaurin agrees with the emphasis placed on agriculture in the region, writing “(t)he surge of industrial development after 1880 that created the modern textile industry in the South changed both the face of the land and the life pattern of much of the white population of the Piedmont. In towns, villages, and open fields, cotton mills sprang up in a traditionally agricultural land until it became impossible for one to escape the physical evidence of the mills’ dominance of the area.” Melton McLaurin, Paternalism and Protest (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 3; C. Vann Woodward writes that “mill village paternalism was cut from the same pattern of poverty and makeshift necessity that had served for the plantation and crop-lien system.” This helps show the movement of the system from one time period to another. C. Vann Woodward, “Origins of the New South: 1877-1913.” In A History of the South vol. 9, ed. Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947, 223.

10 James Scherer also believes cotton mill owners were expending their control of the region. “Cotton mill president or manager…the man who, more than any other, is making ‘the New South.” Scherer, Cotton as a World Power, 318.
federal government, and a strong level of paternalistic control on the local level. These were many of the exact concepts seen not only in the antebellum South, but also dating back to Medieval Europe. Southern leaders took the same base components and rebranded them as if they were a new system for running their society.

Not everything went poorly for the American South, however. “In the late 1800’s the South began to enjoy some of the benefits of recovery from the Civil War and reconstruction periods. Political self-direction, the accumulation of capital, the building of railroads, and the growth of population combined to form a stimulus for industrial diversification and expansion.” These multiple points of advancement allowed the South to increase its textile production.

Large landowners were a fixture in the American South throughout its history. Cotton was the main crop. In the nineteenth century it “was almost a

---


12 “The Civil War not only destroyed the southern economy but left the South itself, where most of the war was fought, in ruins. For southern leaders, who vowed that the South would rise again and sought to restore white supremacy and economic stability, industrialization was now an imperative, and the southern gentry devised a plan called the Cotton Mill Campaign.” Victoria Byerly, *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1986), 11; William B. Hesseltine and David L. Smiley, *The South in American History*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1960), 587. William Hesseltine makes a more specific claim, writing that in 1929 almost half of all cash in the American South came from cotton production.
code-word, a short-hand for Southern economic endeavor.”

With slavery outlawed, producing large amounts of many crops was no longer feasible. As a result, landowners had to find a more productive use for their large land holdings. They turned to textiles.

After the Civil War many large landowners switched from owning plantation style farms to land was conducive for creating mill villages to exploit the boom in the textile industry. Large-scale land ownership in the American South, like in medieval Europe before it, served an important role in maintaining the patronage system. Many upper class citizens in the region, because of their history of running a large-scale agrarian economy, made a natural progression from owning plantations to owning mills.

---


15 Parker agrees that the switch to mill villages during this time was a natural progression because “(c)otton manufacturing began in South Carolina before the Revolution, but slavery prevented its growth, promoting agriculture to the neglect of all other industrial pursuits.” Thomas Parker, “The South Carolina Cotton Mill Village—A Manufacturer’s View,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 9, No. 1 (January 1910), 328.

16 Woodman gives part of the credit to the large switch to textiles to the “immediate profit” available from cotton production. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers*, 246.
The one crop that defined the American South was cotton. It was barely hyperbolic when Southern Senator James H. Hammond declared, “Cotton is King!” This crop dominated the agricultural part of the South, and then began to dominate to industrial part of the region.  This does not overstate the importance of cotton in Southern communities, but merely shows its reach. Cotton production grew rapidly across the South.

The growth of the textile industry also occurred quickly through the American South in the years following the Civil War in both its international importance and in its total production. “In 1880 the Southern States had slightly more than half a million spindles…and in 1908 10.4 millions.” Because of this increase in available spindles between 1880 and 1907 South Carolina increased its

---

17 Bruce Collins gives examples of the dominance of cotton by writing that cotton “set the annual time-table of agricultural events, shaped the distribution and use of land and underpinned the cash economy.” Collins, White Society in the Antebellum South, 40.

18 Jacobson writes, “the most important consequence of the huge demand for cotton, as it related to economic growth, was creation of a market broad enough to promote specialized economic activity in different sectors and different geographic regions.” Jacobson and Smith, Cotton’s Renaissance, 44.

production of cotton from 522, 54820 475 pound bales to 1,163,565,21 North Carolina from 389,59822 to 637,961,23 and Georgia more than doubled from 814,44124 to 1,860, 323.25 In all, the cotton produced in these three states more than doubled in less than thirty years. Over all, “(t)he supply of cotton in the United States for the year ending July 31, 1919, amounted to 15, 695, 107 bales.”26

In addition to the amount of textiles being produced, the number of workers involved in the industry also grew at a similar pace. Between 1880 and 1905, “(t)he percentage of men in this section rose gradually from 28.4 per cent…to 45.5 per


cent.”

By 1919, 1,023,435 people worked in textiles, including 969,260 who were wage earners (the laborer portion of the textile industry). These numbers represented a huge growth spreading across the entire region. Because of this, many poor workers identified themselves by the work they did producing textiles. A person defining themselves by their jobs grants a large amount of power to the employer controlling that job. The more necessary a job is to an individual, the more that individual is willing to accept to keep that job.

Cotton was indeed king in the American South, but it expanded across all of the United States. The increase of textile production caused an increase in the amount of infrastructure projects across the South. The south built many roads and

---


29 Ibid.


31 According to a Senate report from the period, cotton manufacturing “employs more people than any other manufacturing industry in the United States except foundry and machine shop products.” Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 18; Additionally, according to the 1920 US Census, “(c)otton manufactures rank as the most important branch of the textile industry. In 1919 the value of cotton manufactures amount to over two billion dollars, or nearly 40 per cent of the total value of products for all kinds of textiles combined.” U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 157.
railroads to accommodate the need to export cotton products from the region. This increase in regional textile production was yet another sign that for peasant workers in the American South, life in the textile industry was almost impossible to avoid.

The growth of its cotton industry after the Civil War turned the South from merely a region seen as a large agricultural provider into a major player in the newly expanding textile industry. While the region was always a major player in the textile industry, this continuation became more important with the economic growth of manufacturing. In fact, by 1919, “more than one-half of the total value of products for the industry was reported by three states—Massachusetts and the Carolinas.” This was primarily due to the advantages the South had when it came to producing cotton. These advantages for manufacturing cotton included “presence of the staple, cheap coal for fuel, water power for driving and iron for manufacturing

32 James Watkins, *King Cotton* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1908), 23. James Watkins discusses the increase in infrastructure between 1880 and 1890 as a byproduct of the textile industry.

33 Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 59. Hall points out that although the textile industry was spreading across the South, Southern leaders were still fighting against federal involvement in the industry, an action which shows not just their want to remain the preeminent power in the region, but also a continuation of the States-rights policies seen in the region prior to the Civil War.

34 John Wormald, *The Sprinkler Bulletin* (Manchester, England: Mutual Fire Insurance Corporation, June, 1913). The South was providing the majority of the cotton in the United States, the country producing the most cotton in the world. According to John Wormald, in 1916 the United States produced $1,015,635,000 out of $1,453,125,000 of cotton worldwide.

machinery, railroad facilities, supply of labor, etc.’” With the large amount of money coming in as a result of the textile industry, the leaders of the region increased their level of economic control.

Like the American South, medieval Europe placed a high priority on the importance of mills and mill villages. This is because mills in both systems served as an easy way to make a profit off of the available land. In the patronage system of medieval Europe, “(t)here can be little doubt that its diffusion was closely connected with the spread of the system of great estates and the exploitation of the soil within the framework of the manor.” This same description could be given verbatim regarding the spread of wealth throughout the history of the American South. As with medieval Europe, workers in the American South owed the landowners for their jobs and maintained the homes and gardens of the community as payment for that debt. These same basic similarities would be important in allowing the patronage system to flourish in the American South eight hundred years after it began developing in Europe.

---


The American South, like the mills of New England and the patronage system of medieval Europe before it, developed into a society in which the poorer classes of citizens relied on the largess of the wealthy landowners. Paternalism allowed the landed elites of the Southern society to remain in a position of power by being the sole provider of many goods and services, as well as being the controlling factor in many local governments. This occurred as people moved from farms to mill villages, thus causing “the transformation of farm folk into a factory proletariat.” In 1949 the typical Southern cotton mill village “still strongly resembles the industry-owned villages that were built around the rural mills of England and New England a hundred and fifty years ago.” In addition to encouraging the bonds of paternalism like those seen in the North, “(t)he South, in

---

39 Scherer, *Cotton As a World Power*, 314-15. In *Cotton As a World Power*, Scherer shows that the movement of people from living solitarily in mills to living amongst others in a city changed the worldviews held by these people. Mill owners could exploit this changing view to convince mill workers it was the owners who were responsible for all of the good changes associated with living in a mill village. This would increase dependence on the mill owner by mill workers who wanted to keep their new lifestyles.

40 Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 120. Hall writes that many mills did not allow their employees to vote for town councils or local governments, a process that meant that no one in the town would rise to a position of power that could rival that of the mill owners.


the matter of housing its factory operatives, is now in a state of development somewhat similar to that through which many of the smaller mills of New England passed twenty-five or thirty years ago.” Southern mill owners saw a system they thought worked in the American North and decided they could improve upon it. This improvement came primarily in terms of production, but also in how they dealt with mill workers.

Because of the increase in need for mill employees, owners brought in new employees from outside the textile industry. In order to bring farmers into these mill villages built “good new homes, with from four to six rooms,” for the employees who previously lived in “remote scattered homes inaccessible to civilizing influences.”

Many citizens of the time felt that mill owners had an

---

43 Senate, *Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States*, 529. This quote by the US Senate helps show that the system seen in the South, which had been seen previously on some level in the North, was a system capable of adapting and continuing from one area to another.

44 “As the mill boom accelerated, manufacturers took eagerly to the newest machinery.” Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*, 119.

45 “Generally speaking, the relations between employer and employees are much more intimate in the cotton mills of the South.” Senate, *Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States*, 539.

46 Salley observes that paternalism was not only the way mills were controlled, but was used “to attract and maintain workers—often families.” Shelley Salley, *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004) 11.

obligation to help their workers. Moving their employees into mill housing was one of the ways in which mill owners fulfilled this obligation.\textsuperscript{48}

The owners of these cotton mills worked to keep these areas self-contained. They could generally do this because “(t)he typical urban community in much of the South was no more than a village.”\textsuperscript{49} Lack of large urban areas meant that there was little reason for workers to leave their village, since they could likely find everything necessary in their own village.\textsuperscript{50} Another reason why it was not difficult to create self-contained areas in the South was that it had precedent in the region. Even before the Civil War, “plantations and farms both strove to be self-sufficient in food and where not bound together in cloying interdependence.”\textsuperscript{51}

While plantations and later mill villages would attempt to be self-sufficient, one of the ways they did this was creating a community within the village or farm where people could help one another. Mill villages were designed to give the

\textsuperscript{48} Parker makes the case that this paternalistic role helped the mill workers and it caused them to be “profoundly influenced for good economically, religiously, and socially.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Collins, \textit{White Society in the Antebellum South}, 29.

\textsuperscript{50} This Senate report shows that, for the most part “(m)ill workers (had) very few social relations with other people; they (had) an almost entirely separate social and industrial life.” Senate, \textit{Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States}, 585.

\textsuperscript{51} Collins, \textit{White Society in the Antebellum South}, 38.
residents the feeling that “you’re more like a family than you are neighbors.”\textsuperscript{52} Making villages into a more familial setting increased the perception that the mill owners served a paternalistic role in the community.\textsuperscript{53}

In these communities there was a sense of “family.”\textsuperscript{54} This meant “everybody would do anything for anybody.”\textsuperscript{55} Neighbors would cook for sick members of the community and since everyone was poor they shared what they did have. This sense of family also meant that the community felt safer around one another. It was not uncommon for neighbors to say that they could leave “for two or three days to visit family and we wouldn’t lock the door.”\textsuperscript{56} Mill residents often shared the idea that “we’re neighbors, but we’re family too.”\textsuperscript{57} This extremely close sense of community being fostered in mill villages did not seem odd to its residents because “that’s the way people was in a village. They were just close.”\textsuperscript{58} The

\textsuperscript{52} Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.

\textsuperscript{53} Scherer feels that this belief in the ability of mill owners to run the towns acted to the detriment of mill town residents. He writes, “trusting in the leadership of cotton mill managers, and at other times maneuvered by astute and unscrupulous politicians to their own hurt.” Scherer, \textit{Cotton As a World Power}, 315.

\textsuperscript{54} Byerly, \textit{Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls}, 12.

\textsuperscript{55} Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
importance of establishing a family atmosphere in a community is that it requires an individual to play the paternal role, a role well suited for the individuals providing the employment for the area.

The owners of cotton mills did not rely solely on the people in their village to make the textile industry run smoothly. In fact, “(t)he production of the annual cotton crop involves a complex division of labor…(s)ome persons supply credit, some supervision, and 90 per cent of the rural residents supply their physical labor.”59 This meant that cotton mills relied on an extremely large number of Southern residents who did not even live in the mill villages. These were primarily poor farmers who tried to eke out meager subsistence selling cotton.60

The American South, after losing the almost free labor of slavery, looked for another way to make their products with a minimal overhead. This need for cheap exports was one of the reasons cotton production was so appealing. Over the century following the Civil War, Southern dependence on cotton locked the South “into an agricultural life that was familiar and familial.”61 This cotton production “made the South a far more concentratedly agricultural section than any other part of the

59 Allison Davis, Burleigh Gardner, and Mary Gardner, Deep South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 324.

60 Woodman writes that an agriculture based society kept these small farmers in a cycle of poverty because small-scale agriculture was, and continues to be, a “generally low-income industry.” Woodman, King Cotton and His Retainers, 346.

61 Collins, White Society in the Antebellum South, 32.
country. “In addition to a large number of farmers the textile industry needed to rely on a large amount of land.”

In order to get away from the economic downfall that resulted from the Civil War, the American South turned to cotton. Being involved in the production of cotton from growing to processing stimulated this regional growth. While the American South relied on cotton to help the economy, it was this dependence that locked so many Southern citizens into a life dependent on cotton production. This "new system" locked southern residents into many of the same lifestyles as those in Europe centuries prior.

---

62 Ibid., 33.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOUSING, FOOD, AND SUPPLIES: WHO OWNS A COMMUNITY?

The main way to establish a paternal control over someone is to own what they need. Both medieval Europe and the American South were paternal societies operated by landed elites controlling the peasant class. Land ownership in particular was a key similarity between these two regions. In Norman England a small number of people owned a large amount of land. Not only did this small group own most of the land; land ownership gave them other rights and powers not given to the working poor. Wealth created a social construct that gave more rights to the wealthy and less to the poor. Since its inception, a small group of individuals owning large tracts of land dominated the American South. After the Civil War large landowners went from owning plantations to owning mill villages. Large land holdings were not a new concept for the region; there was just a new purpose for these individual areas of land. The power given to land owners in both societies gave them control over the community.¹ Landowners claimed this power was not designed solely for their benefit as individuals; it was designed to increase the economic situation of the

region as a whole.² This economic change in the region, regardless for whom it was intended, served to not only continue many of the policies of the American South, it served as a striking example of how certain agrarian land use policies could extend throughout centuries.

These landed elites did not just control the mill villages; they actually owned the villages almost in their entirety. Control of the entire village meant landowners controlled everything vital to village residents. This meant control of the physical aspects of a town translated to control of the village residents.³ Mill resident Marshall Evatt said many mill owners owned as many as “eight or ten mills”⁴ within a small region.

Much of the village control seen in the American South is similar in content to control seen in medieval Europe. Much of the first-hand information regarding

² The South “had a long textile history of paternalism to exaggerate for public relations purposes and a New South creed that bolstered the idea that economic progress brought social progress.” Shelley Salley, The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 21.

³ “As landlord, storekeeper, and creditor, the country merchant became the most important economic power in the Southern countryside.” Harold Woodman, King Cotton and His Retainers (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1968) 296; Parker agrees that this control was imperative for landowners because “(i)t (was) undeniable that operatives who g(ot) their entire support from a manufacturer, and live(d) in his houses, c(ould) be greatly influenced by him for good or evil, and responsibility always accompanie(d) the power of such an employer.” Thomas Parker, “The South Carolina Cotton Mill Village—A Manufacturer’s View,” The South Atlantic Quarterly 9, No. 1 (January 1910), 336.

the condition of the patronage system in England immediately after the Norman Conquest comes from the Domesday Book. This book came about as a way for King William to count all that was contained in England in the latter part of the eleventh century. This great work shows how English villages quickly changed into the villages that would come to be associated with “feudal” England. The Domesday Book not only gives an exceedingly large amount of data regarding the state of England statistically during this time period, but also helps to show the movement of England as part of the evolving process of patronage. Domesday allows this movement to be seen by showing the exact socioeconomic state of England at a specific time.

Often in medieval Europe kings and burgers controlled towns and villages. Because the patronage system is based on local control there were multiple varieties of patronage, but most of them relied on this land control. These individuals owned everything from the land, to the buildings on that land. Often these holdings included a mill for the area. Anything a peasant wanted to do, from farming the land, to grazing livestock, to using the mill, had to be done with the permission of the village owner.

---

5 Just as it would prove to be in the American South, in medieval Europe “(t)he big business was therefore the mill.” The fact that this quote by Bois could be about either medieval Europe or the American South helps to illustrate just how similar aspects of these two societies were. Guy Bois, The Crisis of Feudalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 227.
Mill owners controlled almost every relevant aspect of mill villages. A person must give up almost all sense of control in order to get the stability that came along with a regular job at a mill. This was yet another similarity to the villages of medieval Europe.\(^6\) Little changed regarding who maintained control over villages in the time between medieval Europe and the post-Civil War South because little changed regarding what was controlled in these towns and villages.\(^7\)

In the mill villages of the American South, control generally came from a higher authority, the mill ownership itself.\(^8\) At times a group of people ran a manufacturing company and exercised this authority, but at other times it would be a single individual. In addition to the mill itself, the mill owners controlled everything

\(^6\) Rosener agrees with this idea, pointing out that during the height of the patronage system in Europe, “the extent of peasant rights in the village was determined by both communal forces and the actual strength of the village lord.” Werner Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 155.

\(^7\) Even government records acknowledged the control the landed elites had over the textile towns of the American South. After holding a hearing regarding the condition of mill villages in the early part of the twentieth century, a Congressional committee wrote that “(p)ractically speaking, the company owns everything and controls everything, and to a large extent controls everybody in the mill village.” Senate, *Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States*, by Charles Patrick Neill, 61\(^{st}\) Congress, Senate Report 645 (US Bureau of Labor, 1910), 537-38.

\(^8\) Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers*, 285. Woodman discusses the increased importance of merchants with the rise of industrialization in the American South.
from homes, to general stores, to schools, to doctors. These “(v)illages controlled by mill companies are found chiefly in North Carolina and South Carolina.” These also happen to be the states in the South that produced some of the largest amounts of cotton. While this arrangement occurred most often in the Carolinas, as a whole, “the cotton mill village has long been an important feature in the physical and social landscape of the South.” Across the cotton-producing region of the American South were villages “where the mill company owned all of the land, the houses, etc., prescribed and enforced all regulations, and did about all that was done for the social, moral, and intellectual development of the people. This condition of affairs was found chiefly in the South.”

Because mill owners, as a rule, were not in the mill villages on a daily basis, they delegated control over the mill to people who were there. The people gaining control over the mill were generally high-level mill employees such as supervisors or overseers. Delegating control to high-ranking members of the community was


10 Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 539.

11 Harriet Herring, Passing of the Mill Village (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1949), 4. With this quote Herring reinforces the fact that although the plan to expand cotton production was being hailed as a new idea, it was rooted in a system already in place across the South.

12 Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 537.
not new to mill villages. In medieval Europe, “(o)n the great domains the demesne farm of the manor was usually run by a steward or bailiff and his family, assisted by a number of dependent domestics who were also members of his household community.”¹³ This delegation allowed landowners to maintain their control over the land without being involved on a daily basis.

One of the reasons mill owners controlled the mills to such an extent was that “there seems to be a clearly defined opinion among Southern cotton-mill owners, which is shared largely by the operatives themselves, that the affairs of the village can be better administered by the companies than by the work people, many of whom have always been more or less dependent on others for guidance.”¹⁴

The idea of a company running a town better than its inhabitants was ubiquitous across the South. Because of this view, “(t)he company-owned village has been a conspicuous adjunct of the cotton mill whenever and wherever this branch of textiles has sprung up.”¹⁵ This view was held primarily because many of the mill village residents came from small farms and had little experience dealing with other people. This lack of experience dealing with anything other than the day-to-day aspects of farming meant that “Mill folks did not think in terms of careers and

¹³ Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages, 176.

¹⁴ Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 522.

¹⁵ Herring, Passing of the Mill Village, 3.
advancement, for theirs was not a progressive view of life."\textsuperscript{16} This lack of concern for long-term goals was not restricted to Southern farmers. A focus on subsistence living has historically been a quality of peasant farmers and is yet another aspect that drew together the working class of the patronage systems in medieval Europe and the American South.

There would prove to be many advantages for people moving from farms to mills, but these advantages came with one great loss: their independence. The absence of independence in mill towns was no accident.\textsuperscript{17} Mill owners were not just content to control the villages, “(t)he ideal was self-containment – the insulation of villagers from the outside world.”\textsuperscript{18}

Generally, it was not difficult for the farmers to give up this independence when they moved into the new mill communities.\textsuperscript{19} Before they moved to the mill villages many farmers “didn’t have electricity where we lived,” and “had to work all


\textsuperscript{17} In order to maintain their power “(p)aternalist company owners controlled mill villages, leaving workers little independence in contrast to the farm lives they had forsaken.” Cynthia Anderson, \textit{The Social Consequences of Economic Restructuring in the Textile Industry} (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 1.

\textsuperscript{18} Newby, \textit{Plain Folk in the New South}, 261.

\textsuperscript{19} One of the reasons why this loss of independence was so easy to accept was because these villages “represented an improvement over the lean and hungry past, and a promise of a fuller future.” Herring, \textit{Passing of the Mill Village}, 4.
day in the sun.”

Because of what the mill villages offered which were not available in small farms, “the villages were vibrant, even exciting places to folk who had never lived in organized communities.” Often, poorer citizens willingly sacrifice control of their lives, something they do not think about often. Easy access to homes and food supplies made those lives easier.

Mill villages became extremely successful across the American South. This success “emanated from a structure in which the elite owners were obligated to provide for their workers, and the workers were required to uncritically accept it.”

The structure provided to these workers encompassed most of the aspects involved with their life inside the mill villages, ranging from the trivial to the important. In both medieval Europe and the American South landowners maintained economic and social control over their employees. Not only did this create differences between employers and employees, but also between the peasant class of mill villages and the poor of other regions of the United States.

---


21 Newby, Plain Folk in the New South, 259.


Most mill companies owned the housing surrounding their mills.\textsuperscript{24} This is why one of the main things associated with mill villages is the mill control of the village housing. The reason this is the main association made is because houses are generally one of the most important part of any community. Owning homes in the village was one thing almost every mill village had in common.\textsuperscript{25} In addition to mills owning a large majority of mill houses, “(i)t is the invariable rule in the South that the rent money for company-owned houses is deducted from the wages due the family on each pay day.”\textsuperscript{26} Rent was automatically deducted from the mill employee’s paycheck, but this rent included all utilities.\textsuperscript{27} Often mills had “free utilities for the overseers.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24} Byerly, \textit{Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls}, 12.

\textsuperscript{25} A Senate report from the time said that during the later part of the nineteenth century “a typical village of this type in the South is never incorporated. All the houses in which the operatives live are owned by the mill company.” Senate, \textit{Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States}, 538.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 524; An interview with Wegner confirmed an example of this. Wegner writes that in the village of Newry “rent was automatically deducted from one’s paycheck each Friday. In the early 1900’s rent was 25 cents per room per week.” Daniel Wegner, \textit{Recollections of Life in a Southern Textile Mill Village} (Clemson, SC: Clemson University, 1979), 19; Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010. In the same mill village of Newry by 1939 a person doing the entry level job sweeping and doffing (manually removing fibers from a cotton carding machine) made $11 a week, and rent for two rooms had gone up to seventy-five cents per week.

\textsuperscript{27} Marshall Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
Once they became available to the general public, mill owners provided utilities as part of the rent because these mills “made (their) own power.”29 As the utilities to society changed, so to did the utilities in the mill villages. During the early portion of the twentieth century utilities generally only included electricity. Making their own electricity was yet another way that the mill owners helped themselves remain “completely self-contained.”30 By making their own power mill owners controlled not only the houses in the communities, but also the methods for making those houses comfortable. In addition to providing utilities mills also made free repairs on these houses.31

Control of the houses could lead to a better control of the mill village in many ways.32 On was that it kept the village looking the way the company wanted it.33 This control rewarded company employees who did what the company wanted

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


33 In a copy of several mill documents the mill admitted to controlling the homes by deciding that “(t)he method in which a family conducts itself and the way a family keeps up the premises will be considered in whether they are given a house or not and somewhat govern the location of the house if they are given one.” Clifton Manufacturing Company, *Guide for Assigning Houses in Villages*, Oct. 3, 1949, (Clemson University Special Collections).
them to do and also allowed the mill to have the employees who were not maintaining their homes in a part of the village that was not often seen by outsiders.

In order for a family to move into a better house in the village they would “ask for the house and the super would decide who lived in the house.” The mills could do this because so many people were looking to move into mill villages that “sometimes there would be a truck lined up to move in when somebody was moving out.”

Having control over where someone lived was not exclusive to mill villages. An example of this occurred in medieval Europe in 1092. King William decided that he needed to increase the size of the village of Carlisle, so he “sent many people there with their wives and cattle to live there to cultivate the land.” Having the power to move a person to another city is similar to having the power to prevent someone from moving into a community.

Having a home owned by the mill came with both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that the company would be responsible for any maintenance necessary for the house. Not only did this free maintenance include

---


35 Ibid.

providing carpenters, electricians, plumbers for no charge when needed; it also included the companies keeping the outsides of the houses painted regularly.\textsuperscript{37}

One of the disadvantages of the company owning the house was that in many mill villages if a person was fired then their family could be evicted from the house and left with no place to go. This produced a great dependence by the families for the company who provided them with not only a job, but also a place to live.\textsuperscript{38}

Even after companies stopped demanding that multiple people from each house work at the mill, many required that at least “one of (the) family had to work at the mill in order to get a house” in the village.\textsuperscript{39} In order to get the cheap rent available in mill villages some families had one person in the house remain employed at the mill even though everyone else in the family worked elsewhere.\textsuperscript{40} Rent outside the mill village was generally “a good bit more.”\textsuperscript{41} Having at least one

\textsuperscript{37} Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.

\textsuperscript{38} According to research of the mill’s records, the system of mill housing and hiring labor in family units appears to have been used to “create dependence and lower the wages of nonsupervisory personnel.” William Phillips, "Southern Textile Mill Villages on the Eve of World War II: The Courtenay Mill of South Carolina," \textit{The Journal of Economic History} 45 (1985): 274.


\textsuperscript{40} Melton McLaurin, \textit{Paternalism and Protest} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971), 23. McLaurin asserts that allowing this member of the household to be any member, including women and children took away the role of provider form the men in the houses and therefore increased the paternalistic role of the mill.

\textsuperscript{41} Marshall Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
member of the family working for the mill was not difficult because even children, “when they were 10 and 12 and 13 they would go down there barefooted and work.” Children that were not working or going to school would usually be on their own after they were around eight years old. This was partly due to the period and partly to the sense of community fostered in the villages.

The mills not only owned single-family houses. Often, they ran and maintained boarding houses or small hotels in the town. These boarding houses held “five or six families,” thus allowing people who could not afford an entire house to move into the mill villages.

In addition to houses, mills often provided medical help for their employees. Being the sole source of medical help allowed the mill to maintain its position of power and paternalism. People would be much more likely to look fondly on the mill if it was keeping them healthy and safe. “In some mill villages the company chooses the doctor to attend the operatives and their families, making


43 Ibid.

44 Clifton Manufacturing Company, Series 3, Box 10 (Clemson University Special Collections).


46 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 122.
regular deductions from their wages to pay them,”⁴⁷ but mills would generally have a nurse at the mill “at all times”⁴⁸ if the town did not have enough need to warrant keeping a full-time doctor. Mills that decided not to have a doctor living in the village would “call one in” from the nearest town.⁴⁹ The mills generally provided and at least partially paid for the medical services for the mill employees and their families. Mills covered the costs of the doctors and other medical services, by taking a small amount from each paycheck, but when someone had to see the doctor the mill paid the entire bill. Taking a small amount from each paycheck allowed the mill to maintain its role as paternalistic protector while avoiding too many additional costs. According to residents, the mill “would take us to the doctor and it wouldn’t cost us anything.”⁵⁰ Villages not only covered routine care, they also might pay for employees in the hospital.⁵¹

The availability of medical care was an advantage had by few outside of mill villages. While people living on their own would have likely had a difficult time getting to or paying for a doctor, in many mill villages “medical attention provided


⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Clifton Manufacturing Company, *Employee Benefits*, Series 6, Box 3, Folder 60 (Clemson University Special Collections).
by the company was free”52 and the towns had “visiting doctors and dentists”53 that stayed on the premises.

Having access to medical care was a major change for many mill residents who before moving to the mill would likely have never seen a doctor.54 It was not uncommon for a person moving into a mill village to say that they “never went to a doctor until I moved here” and would say upon their first time going to the doctor that “I didn’t know what one was hardly.”55 As with housing, the mill having control over such a vital part of life allowed them to maintain a firm grasp on the day-to-day lives of their employees.

One of the methods used to keep mill workers dependent on the mill was paying them in mill currency.56 A common practice in mill villages was where “the mill paid in checks generally redeemable only in merchandise at the company

52 Wegner, Recollections of Life in a Southern Textile Mill Village, 24.

53 Ibid.

54 McLaurin, Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls, 57.


56 McLaurin, Paternalism and Protest, 29.
store."\(^{57}\) These payments in mill currency were part of a plan that forced people to buy products from the mill store.\(^{58}\)

A large number of mill villages had a company store designed to supply the needs of the townspeople.\(^{59}\) As with housing, running a mill-owned store increased the paternalistic role of the mill owners. These general stores usually sold everything from food to household and farming products.\(^{60}\) These company stores not only provided the goods needed by the village residents, but also provided an additional source of income for the owners of the mills. Being the sole source of all the goods a mill resident needed, increased both their social and economic dependency on the mill owners.

People living in mill villages generally did not have to travel far to buy items for themselves, as most mill villages had their own general stores. These stores carried almost all of the items a person needed for their day-to-day lives. In addition, mills often made it prohibitive for the mill workers to go elsewhere to

\(^{57}\) Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*, 224.

\(^{58}\) In addition to paying employees in mill currency, “(a)n indirect way of compelling employees to trade at company stores (was) to make pay days far apart.” Senate, *Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States*, 601.

\(^{59}\) “More than 1/3 of all southern mills operated company stores at the turn of the century.” Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 130.

\(^{60}\) Clifton Manufacturing Company, *Company Store Inventory*, Series 3, Box 5, Folder 87 (Clemson University Special Collections).
purchase goods. This condition is similar to manorial estates in medieval Europe where “the individual manors had a more or less self-sufficient economy.”

While these stores gave more control to the mill, they offered mill residents several advantages, including the fact the stores were often open seven days a week and were less expensive. Because many of the mill residents did not have cars, having stores near their houses made it convenient for them to get to a store and “they were glad for it to be open.” These stores attempted to sell any items a person in the village might need. In addition to food these stores sold products such as pants, shirts, plows, and more. The fact that mill workers could have their bills deducted directly from their paycheck made the shopping easier for them, while also increasing the control of the owners.

Mills not only wanted their employees to buy product from their general store; they expected them to buy everything from that store. When discussing the history of the mill village of Newry, longtime resident Claude Anderson said, “the

---

61 Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages*, 18.


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Hall, *Like a Family*, 130.
Courtneys wanted you to buy everything from them,“66 and that one time “when a certain man bought a suit of clothes elsewhere and was told by the store manager to return the suit to where he had bought it, and to buy one at the company store.”67

Because mill stores could not provide all of the products a village resident needed, they sometimes allowed people from outside the community to come in and sell their goods so residents would not be tempted to leave the village. These people came up from farms in wagons to sell their wares. Generally, these products included items such as produce not found at the store or fresher than the store could provide such as corn, tomatoes, beans, liquor, and milk products.68 When communities met the needs of village residents, these residents had little reason to leave. In addition to increasing dependency, keeping residents from leaving the mill town lowered the chance they would find out how abnormal the control over their life was.

One of the services provided to most towns by the mill owners was education.69 Mills built and paid for these schools solely for the use of the mill

---

66 Claude Anderson, interview by Daniel Wegner, 1978, MSS 278, Cassette 1, Side 1, Clemson University Manuscript Collections, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

67 Ibid.


69 Clifton Manufacturing Company, School House Construction, Series 4, Box 3, Folder 21 (Clemson University Special Collections).
Because many in post-Civil War American thought of education as a basic necessity, mill owners providing this service increased the communities’ perceived reliance on them. Funding education also started this perception of reliance in children as soon as they were old enough to begin school. The importance of education was not always high across the American South, but if people wanted their children to go to school the opportunity was there for them. In some villages “(t)he mill maintains for nine months in the year a kindergarten and a school that offers instruction through four grades. It is supported out of the mill treasury, supplemented from the public school fund of the state. The officers of the mill select the teachers and give the school a wise, general supervision.” In addition to providing for the school to be built, the mill owner generally “selects the teachers and controls the school.” This meant the in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century mills built the schools and paid the salaries of the teachers. 

---

70 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 127.

71 In many villages “the individual mill owner play(ed) a very important part in connection with the common-school systems.” Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 569.


73 Senate, Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States, 538.

74 Clifton Manufacturing Company, Series 3, Box 31 (Clemson University Special Collections, 1945).
Even after the Southern states began providing teachers for all public schools teachers for the mill schools would often stay in housing provided by the mill.\(^{75}\)

Another part of the village societies seen in both medieval Europe and the American South was the presence of churches. Religion was an important element to the members of both of these groups. Patronage did not cause the dominance of religion in the two societies, but a religious atmosphere, with its heavy use of paternalism, helped reinforce the paternalistic cultures in these patronage systems. The importance of religion allowed the people controlling the church to control the societies, and the landowners in both periods largely controlled the church.

As with the schools, the mill owners generally provided the money needed to build churches in their villages.\(^{76}\) In addition to building the church, the mill owner “assists in supporting the pastor of a church or perhaps the pastors of several churches.”\(^{77}\) In some villages, after helping build the church and select the pastor “(t)he company gives a residence and two hundred dollars a year to the pastor of any mill church who lives in the village.”\(^{78}\)


\(^{76}\) Claude Anderson Interview, MSS 278, Cassette 2, Side 1.


\(^{78}\) William Few, “The Constructive Philanthropy of a Southern Cotton Mill,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* VIII, 1 (January 1909): 82; McLaurin, *Paternalism and Protest*, 58. McLaurin writes that this control of the church helped control the
One service provided to mill village residents that often gets overlooked is the presence of libraries. As a result of incentives by mill owners, “(a)n instructive feature of welfare work was the establishment of lending libraries in villages across the New South.”\(^79\) These libraries, along with the access to schools, provided educational opportunities to town residents. There is little chance they could have received these opportunities had their families remained on farms. These once again strengthened the association of education and bettering oneself with the mill owners.

Further control by mill owners was enhanced by the presence of a bailiff or a constable who patrolled the village. This person had state authority but the mill paid their salary.\(^80\) The mills not only paid the constable, but also “appointed who they wanted”\(^81\) for this position. If members of the mill community got out of line, the bailiff “could arrest them and take them to town”\(^82\) or wherever the closest jail was, as many mill villages were too small to warrant having their own jail. This shows that mill owners not only controlled the mill-villagers on an economic level, but also on a legal level.

message that church was delivering, which in turn served to exacerbate the sense of duty mill workers had to stay in the subservient role they had in society.

\(^79\) Newby, \textit{Plain Folk in the New South}, 279.

\(^80\) Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.


\(^82\) Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
One of the main similarities between medieval European villages and mill villages of the American South likely occurred because it evolved the least between the two time periods. This was the presence of a small, personal garden for the family. Families in both patronage systems maintained both small amounts of land on which to grow crops and areas of communal land on which they could raise livestock. The presence of space to grow and produce food for individual families in the American South was simply an evolution from as early period of patronage. These gardens and communal lands were not the exception, but the rule. Dating back to medieval times, “(e)very rural dwelling, however modest, was flanked by a garden, a cartilage, or an orchard.”

This land for maintaining a family’s personal supply of food consisted of two sections, the garden and the grazing land. The garden served as the most personal of these. Although the landowner still owned the garden plots, food grown for the family in the garden was left to the discretion of the family, discretion that the families would not have in many other parts of their lives.

---

83 Rosener points out that “(t)he nuclear village (Haufendorf) with open fields and common lands was the most common type of village in the late Middle Ages.” Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages*, 46.

In both systems of patronage “(t)he fenced-in garden near the peasant house was important for food supplies.” These gardens were vital to the day-to-day life of village residents. In both systems of patronage “(p)easant gardens were typical kitchen rather than ornamental gardens, a type of agriculturally productive land which produced everything needed for the peasant diet apart from bread.” These gardens allowed the peasant farmers in medieval Europe to have food in addition to that in the communal plots, and in the American South these gardens allowed mill village residents to have food from a different source than the company stores. Even though they were still on land owned by the upper class, these gardens made it possible for the residents to have a small amount of control over their own lives.

In addition to personal gardens, communal land played a large role in the productivity of peasant villages. These fields were necessary to the raising of livestock. Many lower class citizens had little to no access to protein as a part of their diets without this livestock and the small animals such as pigs and chickens they kept in their personal gardens. The necessity of these communal plots yet again emphasized the importance of the landowners. Relying on people such as the mill owners for land to produce food was yet another way that the landowners maintained their paternalistic role.

---

85 Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages, 129.

86 Ibid.

87 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 115.
Like with personal gardens, communal land for raising livestock was more of a rule than an exception. In mill villages the “company would furnish you a place to keep your animals.”\textsuperscript{88} This generally allowed members of a mill community a pasture close to the village homes to keep animals such as cows or hogs.\textsuperscript{89} Dating back over a thousand years, “(c)ollective use of non-arable land may also have been quite widespread.”\textsuperscript{90} While landed elites still owned this land,\textsuperscript{91} the residents of these villages saw this land as “(a) pasture free of charge is kept for the use of families that have cows” and “who wish to raise chickens.”\textsuperscript{92}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the residents of villages ranging from medieval Europe to the American South paid for these communal fields not with money but with their service. In both societies the peasant classes “were burdened with labour services and dues (usually in kind) for the profit of the lord. All gave their occupant common rights of usage over the natural meadows, marches, heath, or

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} Marshall Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Susan Reynolds, \textit{Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 111.
\item \textsuperscript{91} “The company decides whether cows and swine shall be allowed in the village.” Senate, \textit{Report On Condition Of Woman and Child Wage-earners In the United States}, 538.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
forest which surrounded the cultivated soil.” People of the time saw these communal as one of the rewards for agreeing to move into a community that required taking many of the personal rights of the individual residents.

Many mill villages had baseball fields and provided the funding to field baseball teams. This was not only done to foster a strong sense of community, but also because there was little else to do in the villages. Most mill teams played against other nearby mill towns in what were generally referred to as “mill leagues.” These baseball games were some of the few times where people in mill villages had a chance to see people in other mill villages.

In addition to these main services, some towns provided many other services which were less obvious, but still helpful. Some of these other extras provided to the residents of mill villages included things such as a “library, reading room, smoking room, bowling alley, games and lodge room.” Some of the extras provided to the residents of European villages included many towns with fisheries

---

93 Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, 61.


96 Ibid.

and salt mills. Mill companies also had pool halls, barbershops, beauty halls, post offices, Masonic halls and sold caskets for the graveyards provided by the company and on rare occasions having golf courses. Many of the larger mills provided social and recreational services. The company that owned the mill was often involved in charitable organizations, council boards and commissions, and statewide organizations. The extent of this list of items shows that the mill owners controlled everything from day to day needs to leisure activities.

Other services provided by the mill companies include building Scout houses, and providing drinking water plants, and water ponds for fire hydrants. Additionally the mill ran any gas stations in mill villages. Before indoor

---

98 Darby, ed., *Domesday*, 32.
99 Hall, *Like a Family*, 130.
100 Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
102 McLaurin, *Paternalism and Protest*, 37-8; Hall, *Like a Family*, 131. Hall writes that many mills, not just the larger ones, provided these social and recreational areas.
103 Clifton Manufacturing Company, Series 1 (Clemson University Special Collections, 1945).
plumbing mills dug wells, each of which furnished water for several houses. In addition to the communal wells mill owners provided community toilets.

Even time was controlled by the mill. The bells rung by the mill told people when to come in to work and when to be off the streets at night. Often the mill bell rung employees into work round six in the morning. If mill employee were not in by six they were not allowed to work the next day.

Mills also rang the bell to tell people to go to bed and turn off the lights. Often the bailiff patrolled the town to make sure the lights were out. This was so the mill could save money on the electricity they were producing. This control did not necessarily affect the mill workers monetarily, but was an example of how little control they had over their own lives.

The landed elites even maintained control over a community after they died. In the American South this power generally just consisted of passing the control of

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 The mill village residents “were not clock watchers, or had not been when they arrived from the farm, and they depended on the bell to regulate time for them.” Newby, Plain Folk in the New South, 142.
108 Claude Anderson Interview, MSS 278, Cassette 1, Side 1.
109 Matty Evatt remembered that at night “about 8:30 they rang the bell…at 9:00 they rang it again and everyone had to have the lights out.” Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.
110 Ibid.
the villages down to their progeny. In medieval Europe this could actually consist of passing down the workers through the wills of the landowners.

There were many instances of workers being part of the property given away in medieval wills. These wills show landowners maintaining control of their communities in multiple ways. Primarily it showed that the landowners kept people with certain skills that in the community during a time of transition. This helped maintain control during a tumultuous time, and also kept the people with necessary skills in a community.

These medieval wills also occasionally released peasants from their bonds of homage and/or gave them land. This allowed the landowners to maintain control during their lifetime, but feel good about themselves upon their death. Also upon their death some landowners gave their community a temporary break on rent. Wulfgeat did this when “he grants a years’ rent to his men as a gift.” The practice of letting people under your control leave upon your death was still prevalent in the American South.

---

111 One example of this occurred when a man named Wynflaed requested his servant “Wufflaed is to be freed, on condition that she serves Aethelflaed and Eadgifu.” Wynflaed also “bequeaths to Eadgifu, a woman-weaver and a seamstress the one called Eadgifu, the other Aethelgifu.” Dorothy Whitelock, ed., “The Will of Wynflaed,” Anglo-Saxon Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 11.

Landowners in both eras looked after their own needs even if it was at the expense of the peasant workers.\textsuperscript{113} Medieval European communities charging more to the peasant class as a means of keeping the income of the landed elites at a high level is similar to the example in the American South of mill owners slowly paying mill workers less for the same amount of cotton, forcing them to produce more product in order to maintain the same standard of living.

From the very beginning of the patronage system, European lords “often sought to lay hold of property”\textsuperscript{114} in order to increase their power. This desire for power meant that “the manorial regime should not be confused with the ownership of landed property: it included control over people.”\textsuperscript{115} The controlling of people continued through the mill villages of the American South. Mill owners, like the medieval lords before them, controlled not only the land on which peasants lived, but also many aspects of the peasants’ lives. In addition to increasing their power, landowners providing services to their residents gave them the role of paternalistic protector of the village. Most mill villages had no elected officials and any of the aspects that would generally be thought of as the duties provided by these officials

\textsuperscript{113} England in 1097 is an example of a bad year economically for peasant farmers because it “was in every respect a very severe year, and over-oppressive with bad weather, when cultivation was due to be done or crops to be got in, and with excessive taxes that never ceased.” Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds., \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, 175.

\textsuperscript{114} Bloch, \textit{Feudal Society}, 163.

\textsuperscript{115} Rosener, \textit{Peasants In the Middle Ages}, 212.
would instead be provided by the mill. While some mill owners likely cared about their workers and took their role seriously, others likely used paternalism as an excuse for keeping a tight grip on the community. This worked in mill villages because “people were a little like sheep in those days.”

Because of the services provided to the residents of these small villages, “the manor was not only an economic but a social institution.”

Part of the paternalism came from the limited interactions between mill owners and employees. While occasionally mill owners would be mean to their employees, generally “you couldn’t ask anyone to be nicer” because the mill owners “didn’t want anybody mistreated.”

While there are some differences in what the towns in the two time periods provided, this is most likely due to societal differences rather than differences between systems. Both relied heavily on creating dependence by providing all necessities.

---

116 John Gaillard, interview by Daniel Wegner, 1978, MSS 278, Cassette 3, Side 2, Clemson University Manuscript Collections, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

117 Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, 62.

118 Mill owners “would come down at least once a month” and be “as friendly and nice as they could be.” Matty Evatt, interview by author, Newry, SC, March 31, 2010.

119 Ibid.
Any difference between these two societies is made negligible by the amount of similarities. Both of these societies were designed solely to create a sense of control based on landownership. Both of these agricultural societies created this control by managing the smallest details of their workers’ lives. This control on small levels added up and contributed to the control on larger levels. This sense that the landowner knew best kept the working class from realizing the decisions they made might provide them with a marginally better life, but that came at the loss of the one thing they had away from the mill, a sense of independence.
CHAPTER FIVE

POPULATION DENSITY AND WORKER’S RIGHTS: A LACK OF OTHER OPTIONS

As a result of the Civil War, the American South in the latter part of the nineteenth century was a region in a state of change. This change occurred on political, physical, and economic levels. Of these, the two that impacted the rise of mill villages were political and economic. People in politics tried to deal with the loss of the Civil War, and the lower socioeconomic portions of society tried to provide for themselves with the market flooded with freed slaves available to work for low wages.

Low population density was a major reason for the patronage system’s continuing to exist in the American South.¹ Like medieval Europe before it, the American South was a large geographic region, with fewer large cities than in North. Both medieval Europe and the American South consisted primarily of farmland. According to the 1920 Census, the population per square mile in Massachusetts was 479.2, compared to the 55.2 in South Carolina and 52.5 in North Carolina.² These areas with less dense populations had little job diversity and needed residents to

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, Volume 1: Population*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940, 20. In 1900, the urban population in the American North was 50.8%, in the South it was just 18.0%.

focus on jobs that helped themselves survive rather than types of industry that would pay better. This low population density not only gave few employment options for the working class, but also allowed for the owning of large amounts of land as a viable option. Maintaining this agrarian society helped make the transition of the patronage system from Europe to the United States a much more natural process.

Although the total populations of the states in the North and the South were not extremely different, the population densities varied greatly between the two regions primarily because of the size of the states in the North versus the South. Purely in terms of size, the square miles of land in Massachusetts were 8,039 as opposed to 30,495 in South Carolina and 48,740 in North Carolina. It is also because of this low population density that “(t)here is evidence that stable family life was rewarded, mill housing was used to create dependence, and locally recruited workers received less pay than those from other areas.”

While the population density was much lower in the South, the overall populations in both regions grew at a very brisk pace. Between 1880 and 1920 the population of Massachusetts rose from 1,783,085 to 3,852,358; the population of

---

3 “The mills were the Mecca of all who had only their labor to sell in exchange for a means of livelihood.” M.D.C. Crawford, *The Heritage of Cotton* (New York: Fairchild Publishing Company, 1948), 173.


South Carolina from 995,577 to 1,683,724; and that of North Carolina from 1,399,750 to 2,550,123. This rapid growth in population led towards a greater number of options for lower class citizens of the regions, additional options that would gradually change the mill towns.

The peasantry in Newry, South Carolina, like those in many mill communities, had few viable employment alternatives. Unlike large cities in the North, there were few densely populated areas in the American South. The only city of decent size near Newry was Greenville, South Carolina, and the only major cities in the region were Charleston in South Carolina and Atlanta and Savannah in Georgia. This lack of urban areas meant that mills were the primary employer for an entire town, a luxury that was not available to Northern towns that would more often be closer to large cities such as New York, Boston, or Philadelphia. Because there were fewer employment options for the working class citizens, the mill owners were able to maintain a greater position of power.

In the end, many people moved into mill villages because they felt it gave them better options than they had in jobs outside of the mill. Based on the results of his interviews with several mill residents Wegner wrote, “most of the people who came to Newry originally came from farm and rural areas. And life in Newry was an improvement for them in many ways. They enjoyed a steady job, shorter work

---


week, and many conveniences which they did not have on the farm." These people felt that a loss of control of personal freedoms such as owning a house and choosing where they could go were more than made up for by the security and convenience the mill villages offered.

The lack of labor unions played a key role in the lack of workers’ rights in the South. Labor unions formed in the North, but few formed in the South. The states in the South continued to be what is known as “right to work” states. “Right to work” states are ones that prohibit agreements between unions and employers making union membership a condition of employment. This lack of unions had to do primarily with the lack of job options in the South. There were so many people willing to work in mills that if mill workers tried to strike for better job conditions or tried to unionize, people who would not unionize could very easily replace them. As a result of the Great Depression mills were open on a limited basis and workers, thankful for a job, had little interest in unions.

_____________________________________


10 Melton McLaurin, *Paternalism and Protest* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 35-6. McLaurin writes that the lack of mills also had to do with the aforementioned fact that the mills owned the houses in which the mill employees lived, yet another advantage of their paternalistic policies.

11 John Gaillard. Interview by Daniel Wegner, 1978, MSS 278, Cassette 2, Side 2, Clemson University Manuscript Collections, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.
It was not only the workers in the South who opposed labor unions. Some people believed cotton manufacturers across the Southern states were “even more strongly opposed to textile labor unions than are those in New England.”

Because unionized workers usually cost more money than non-unionized workers, these textile owners saw the spread of labor unions “as a menace to the prosperity of the cotton manufacturing industry.” This meant that they would have no issue replacing a group of textile workers who would attempt to unionize.

Although it was the mill owners who were getting rich as a result of the rise of mill-villages in the post-Civil War American South, “(t)he mill-workers in the South (were) also the farm-folks, the merchant-folks, the middle group of people who represent the backbone of the South.”

It is these mill workers who can most be related to the “eternal peasant” espoused by Oswald Spengler. These low-income mill-workers were the glue that held together the small communities of the American South. While they had few rights, and even fewer possessions, it was their commonality that allowed the American South to grow as an economic presence and an agricultural power. It was this “backbone of the South” that turned


13 Ibid.

14 William Hays Simpson, Life in Mill Communities (Clinton, SC: PC Press, 1941), 5.
a region that solely grew cotton into a region that provided every level of production between the growing and the selling of cotton.

As the American South grew, so did the opportunities for its residents. The growth of the American South led to a larger population and job options that had not been present before. Ironically, it was the rise in value of the Southern mill workers that would eventually lead to many of their jobs being sent overseas to countries that would do the work for less money
CHAPTER SIX

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAN SOUTH

As a result of its ability to evolve, the patronage system moved successfully from medieval Europe to the American South. This is because, “while cotton mills are commonly found throughout the South, the idea did not originate in this section but was copied from the practices of certain prominent mills in England.”¹ The systems in both times were similar, but several key differences came about as a result of the patronage system keeping up with an ever-changing world.

Discussing the main differences were between patronage in medieval Europe and the post-Civil War American South is important because studying these differences allows us to see what changed in the patronage system and what did not change. The elements that did not change can then be helpful in seeing where and how the patronage system will show up in the future.

One of the key differences between the patronage system in medieval Europe and the American South was the role of the military. Europeans used a large part of the system to reward military for its service and continued protection. In the American South, the government provided the military. This is an important difference between the two eras of patronage because of how it defines the idea of protection. The protection in medieval Europe was a more encompassing reality that

¹ William Hays Simpson, Life in Mill Communities (Clinton, SC: PC Press, 1941), 21.
included a military class of citizens, whereas the protection provided in mill villages of the American South included the service of police officers and accessible medical services.

While the patronage system generally flourished because it provided services the government could not or would not, the fact that the government of the United States of America provided the military was beneficial to the patronage system in the American South. This benefit was the amount of money and land going towards paying soldiers had the system been exactly the same as that of medieval Europe was not necessary. Therefore, the owners of the mills focused solely on making money, rather than the additional responsibility of maintaining a standing army for protection.

The crops grown were a main difference between the two patronage systems. Because of the advancements made in technology, the American South grew a large amount of cotton used for textiles, while Europe grew the types of food needed to feed its citizens. The American South focused on growing a crop that made the region a large amount of money. Because of this change in farming style, many people in the United States grew food for themselves in small personal gardens only as a secondary job. This change also meant much smaller areas of land could provide enough food for a single family, and the rest dedicated to growing cotton or other exportable products.
While many difference between the two systems were a result of societal advancements, one of the differences gave a distinct advantage to the patronage system of medieval Europe. In Europe large landowners fed their workers as part of their payment. This was sometimes one big meal, sometimes two or three meals.\(^2\) On the other hand, mill owners in the American South rarely provided meals for their workers. There could be an occasional fish fry,\(^3\) but rarely during a shift did they provide food. This was likely due to the fact that the mill workers were paid. Because mill workers received a salary, they had fewer societal obligations from the landowners, unlike the peasant class of medieval Europe.

Regardless of which system citizens lived in, the goal of the landowner was to gain power. In Europe one gained power by owning land and having people working for you. This arrangement was instrumental in encouraging the growth of the patronage system because “(t)he development of vassalage and the granting of benefices to vassals were in part, as we have seen, the consequences of a policy deliberately pursued by the Carolingians, who hoped in this way to increase their own authority and the power of the Frankish realm.”\(^4\) Accumulation of wealth determined power in the United States, as well as in most capitalistic societies. The number of people working for a mill owner did not matter as much as the amount of

\(^2\) Werner Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 103-04.

\(^3\) Matty Evatt, *Personal Interview With Author*, 31 March 2010.

product they produced. Having workers was the goal of medieval elites. It was simply a means to an end for the elites of the American South.

Evidence of actually owning persons rather than controlling a community is shown throughout the Domesday Book mentioned earlier. Because it documents all the property of England, this book lists all of the peasant class in England who belonged to someone else.

These statistics also showed the lords who owned peasant-workers, regardless of how large that number was. The Domesday Book showed people who owned only a small amount such as “Ralph of St. Samson” who “holds 1 manor in prebend. It is called Charlton, and answers for 1 sulung. He has 3 villages and 4 smallholders with 1 plough.” It also showed large landowners such as “Hugh de Montfort” who “holds Saltwood from the Archbishop. Before 1066 it answered for 7 sulungs; now for 3 sulungs. Land for 15 ploughs. In lordship 2 ploughs, and 33 villagers with 12 smallholders who have 9 ½ ploughs. A church; 2 slaves; 9 mills at 20s; meadow, 33 acres; woodland, 80 pigs.”

Religious leaders controlled the most property across England. This included the Archbishop of Canterbury. He “held land for 10 ploughs. In lordship 2. 16 villagers with 14 smallholders have 4 ½ ploughs. A church; 10 slaves, 1 mill;
meadow, 6 acres; woodland, 10 pigs.”

Yet another difference between the societies of medieval Europe and the post-Civil War American South was the number of people farming as a profession. In medieval Europe farmers constituted a large majority of people. However, by the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution made advances allowing many fewer people to produce the same amount of crops. This process was known as the “mechanization of agriculture.”

Many other farming techniques, such as using manure to fertilize the fields, began over the time between these two societies. These changes led to more specific jobs for the citizens of the American South and a gradual move from a focus solely on agricultural production to one on agribusiness as a whole. In medieval Europe it would likely have been impossible to have entire villages devoted solely to manufacturing and processing goods such as cotton or wool because there was not the technology to produce the material or the transportation infrastructure in place to move the goods expeditiously. While agriculture was the main focus of both societies, technology developed between the two time periods allowed societies to deal with agriculture in fairly different ways.

Between these two periods, society greatly improved agricultural machinery. In fact, “(t)he mechanization of agriculture…illustrates how new methods of

---

7 Darby, ed., Domesday, 4D.

8 Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages, 107.
farming, by greatly increasing production levels, have transformed traditional agricultural and rural society.”

It is also probable that, “(o)wing to its aim of selling specialized produce at the highest possible profit on the market, a modern farming enterprise cannot be compared with a medieval peasant farm.”

This shows succinctly why the farming of the two ages cannot be compared so far as production is concerned.

One of the more interesting differences between the two patronage systems was the method of payment. In medieval Europe goods going towards the landowners in exchange for the right to work and live on the land was the main form of payment. In the American South the payment went from the textile mills to the mill workers, normally, with money for rent automatically deducted from the paychecks. Both systems paid little to the peasant class; the difference was simply the direction in which payments moved.

Heredity was a key difference between the lives of peasants in medieval Europe and the mill workers of the American South. In Europe citizens automatically went into the same societal position as their parents. This is similar to the caste system later seen in places such as India (an English colony). While many mill workers in the American South had children who also worked in mills, this was not something mandated by law. People could follow their parents into the mill, but

---

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 122.
were not forced to. Society in the South allowed children to pursue their “American Dream,” whatever that dream may have been, if they so chose. Many ended up doing the same jobs as their parents, but there was always an option of climbing the social ladder, something not available to children under the European system of patronage. Americans could move around between mills or even go from a mill to another line of work. This was not an easy option for a peasant in medieval Europe who signed a declaration of homage, a document or ceremony that bonded them to a landowner.

Another difference between the two systems was the manner in which workers showed their frustration with the landed elites. Medieval Europeans showed this by peasant revolts. These revolts “resulted from the obvious opposition between manorial lords and dependent peasants, particularly from the clash of interests between the two groups.”\(^1\) Some feel these peasant revolts are the medieval version of modern day strikes.\(^1\) Both of these methods were the way lower class citizens felt they could best communicate their frustrations to the landowners. Strikes occurred less often in the American South than the American North, but employees occasionally used work stoppages to prove similar points.

One difference between the two patronage systems that is mostly a product of the times is education. Education in medieval Europe was most often a church

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 237.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 237, 243.
action. In America the government provided some level of education. Making sure all children received an education was a goal of American society by the end of the nineteenth century, and put the government in charge of that role. Churches still provided education for many citizens, but because of the total number of people receiving an education, the church numbers represented a far lower percentage.

European churches in the medieval period were the main proponents of education, in addition to their large landholdings. Churches and religious groups shaped European policy with the power they received from large land ownership. Religion played, and stills plays, a large role in the American South. However, those people who gave substantial gifts to the church made their money in secular areas. Often, large landowners were the people built and maintained the churches in their communities. Saying that powerful religious figures often helped shape policy in medieval Europe while powerful policy shapers often helped build religious popularity in the post-Civil War American South can sum up this difference between the two patronage systems.

Between the rise of patronage in Europe and its movement to America, peasant farmers became seen as citizens rather than property. In medieval Europe, control over a person meant owning them, both informally and officially. In addition to land and livestock, the property could include the workers, as it did in
one case where a man controlled as part of his property “40 able-bodied men.” By the time patronage became prevalent in the American South workers still had few rights, but they did have the right to be considered citizens of the United States of America, rather than property.

---

CHAPTER SEVEN

CASH CROPS: EXPORTING WHAT MAKES MONEY

In a testimony to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Eugene Granberry said, “(n)ow I will tell you what advantages I think we have over the North in regard to manufacturing. We use, perhaps, this year in our mill 15,000 bales of cotton. We buy that cotton here…That single advantage gives us $100,000 a year advantage over a New England mill of the same capacity as ours making the same kinds of goods that we make.”¹ It is the reasons explained in this statement by Mr. Eugene Granberry that most accurately outlined the reasons why the manufacturing of cotton became such an important industry to the American South, an industry based on a system continued from medieval Europe.

In a capitalistic society, companies stay in business by making money. In medieval Europe, landowners grew crops primarily to feed the citizens on their land and sustain their holdings. In both systems the end result is achieved by establishing a sense of paternalism. With the introduction of a cheaper and more advanced method of transportation, agricultural communities could exploit the advantages of their land, rather than produce only what was needed by local citizens. One of the main reasons mill villages made so much economic sense in the South was because

they were very close to the source of their product. This proximity to the raw goods meant it cost less to get the product to the mill, and therefore reduced the final cost of producing a good such as cotton to be less than in other areas such as the American North.

Another key reason mills prospered in the American South was the low cost of labor compared to that in other parts of the country. Wages in the South did not move upwards as quickly as those in the North. Multiple variables affected this labor cost.

The first of the reasons for the wage disparity was a lack of as many available employments options in the South. This meant the poor citizens had no leverage against the mills for higher wages. This lack of job availability kept out the labor unions that appeared in the North. This discouraged Southern citizens from demanding better job conditions if their only other options were unemployment or going back to farming. It also maintained the power of the village owner. In addition, because the cost of living remained lower in the American South, the amount needed to maintain a decent lifestyle remained lower than it was in the New England region. These multiple aspects all factored into keeping the wages for Southern workers lower than their counterparts in the North.

Combined, these factors meant that it was cheaper to get goods to the mills located in the American South, and cheaper to process those goods once in the Southern mills. This allowed companies to sell products for a lower cost and still
make a profit. To this day, the idea of selling a product with a cheaper production cost is still the staple of companies such as Wal-Mart.

One of the most important considerations of textile production in the American South, mentioned by Eugene Granberry in his Congressional testimony, was the proximity to their resources. In New England cotton had to be imported in from where it was grown. In the South, the sites were near one another. The American South, like the coal regions of Pennsylvania, grew around closeness to the product it produced, closeness both in geographic proximity and lifestyle. When writing of a mill opening in South Carolina Daniel Wegner wrote that “(t)he site was also ideal for textile manufacturing in those days because of an ample water supply, a fine dam site, and a close proximity to the raw cotton material.”

In addition to the proximity of cotton in the American South, the textile industry was helped by the sustainability of cotton in the region. Farmers growing cotton, unlike coalminers for example, could replace their crop every year. Even though cotton was obviously affected by the weather as all crops are, it would remain fairly reliable, and a crop extremely suited to the Southern climate. Cotton was also easier on the soil as tobacco had been when it was the primary crop of the American South. Also, cotton did not require particularly nutrient rich soil, which made it easier to grow than many other crops. In addition, technological inventions such as the cotton gin had recently expanded the amount of cotton that could be

---

quickly made into textiles. What technology had not created was a way for the peasant class to join technologies producing these agricultural products without giving away their independence.
CHAPTER EIGHT

PATRONAGE NOW

There is an idea in international economics known as the “race to the bottom.” This idea states that since international corporations are run by profit motive, rather than morality, they will move to whatever countries or regions allow them to maximize their profit share. This increase in profit is often brought about by maintaining a low wage paid to the employees and by the recent introduction of free-trade agreements. Therefore, as first-world countries increase their minimum wages, companies have begun to move to less developed countries with lower costs of production.¹ It is because of this economic race to the bottom that cotton mills moved to the American South in the first place. The American South was able to take mills from New England after the Civil War because of a lower par-rate and cheap access to cotton. This ability to move to the place with a lower cost of production is the same as that which allowed the system to move from medieval Europe to the American South.

Recently, the cotton mills of the American South began rapidly disappearing. This is due primarily to globalization. Because of globalization, it is cheaper for

¹“The textile industry seeks out new labor markets from among the world’s poorest peoples and recruits a largely female workplace. It is an industry that has a history of fighting organized labor before leaving and area for another primarily agrarian and industrially backward region.” Victoria Byerly, Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1986), 163.
companies to manufacture cotton goods in other countries and then import them back into the United States. While the textile industry of the American South had been in a slow decline, this decline was greatly exacerbated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This allowed many of the textile jobs previously done in America to be moved to Mexico. In 1975 when the Courtenay Mill was finally closed down it “was a total surprise to everybody” because it was the “only mill Abneys owned that made any money.”

While the patronage system has lessened in the American South, the actions that cause patronage have not disappeared, just relocated. Rosener writes that “(t)he overwhelming majority of the population in most parts of the world today are peasants engaged in agriculture or stock-raising,” including large parts of places such as India, Cameroon, and Mexico.” This shows the ability of patronage to continue even when it seems to some as though it has faded away.

The patronage system still plays an important role in our international community. Peasant workers are still put in a role where their lives are controlled by a paternalistic system. When looking for a connection between the patronage of medieval Europe and the present day, “(o)ne can see from the anthropological works mentioned above how far modern research on the social history of the peasantry has

---


been influenced by the study of the economic, social and political situation in Third World countries.”

While there always have to be certain conditions present for the patronage system to thrive, it has shown over the centuries that it has an ability to persist as the society around it changes. As long as the necessary components for the patronage system are present, the system can advance with the centuries and move between continents. This means that while it is thought of by many as a system from medieval Europe, its reach can be felt to this day.

Patronage will most likely continue to be perpetuated mainly by the economic “race to the bottom.” While companies are paying their workers as little as possible, these people must rely of the benevolence of others for many of their daily necessities. As long as there are people taking advantage of the absence of a less than capable state government there will be the keys in place for a patronage system to exist.

\[4\] Rosener, Peasants In the Middle Ages, 9.
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the similarities between Medieval Europe and the American South, it is possible to say that the patronage system did not disappear, as many people assume. The system of patronage which began gaining prominence in tenth and eleventh century Europe was still the basis for the society seen in mill villages across the nineteenth and twentieth century American South. Many scholars have seen the obvious systems of patronage fade away, but have not seen the continuance of systems that below the surface are based on the same ideas and principles that have been present since before the Norman Conquest of England. The patronage system is a concept that has historically been given a very broad definition. It therefore seems ironic that many academics said that this system died out because it no longer was present in a very specific form. The introduction of a more capitalistic way of life did not kill the patronage system, it simply caused the patronage system to adapt and evolve. Even Voltaire espoused the view that “Feudalism is not an event; it is a very old form which, with differences in its working, subsists in three-quarters of our hemisphere.”

Throughout history, bold men have been remembered for their actions. History remembers men such as Martin Luther, Napoleon Bonaparte, and George

---

Washington. These men however, are the exception rather than the rule. For every man of action that history remembers, there are thousands of people of whom nothing is written. These ordinary people making the safe decisions are the types of citizens that make up the vast majority of any society.

It is because of this large base of people making safe decisions that societies can work. Societies are made up of people who would not think twice about going against the idea of Benjamin Franklin and trading liberty for safety. A society can maintain its stability because most of its citizens are making safe, reliable choices, not trying to make decisions that would “rock the boat.” It is this same stability that allows systems such as patronage to remain in place. It has been a constant throughout history that “(i)n hierarchical societies, attachment to a powerful overlord and marrying one’s identity with his are common devices by which weak, dependent people cope with insecurity.”

In the end, there are many different reasons that a person would elect to move into a company town that took away many of his or her individual rights. Most of those reasons however, lead back to one main idea: safety. Having something guaranteed to a person is a much safer decision than having to work for it. Farmers were moving into the control of the landed elites because “(t)he essence of mill paternalism derived not from the exploitation it facilitated but the reciprocal

relationship it defined. That relationship, between owners and folk, was unequal but mutually dependent.”

There is a famous maxim that says, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” For every person who wants to fight for the best life possible, there are others who are willing to settle for a comfortable life. These are the people that would rather move to a mill village and work twelve-hour shifts at the mill than run the risk of having to work sixteen-hour days to run a family farm. These are the people that would rather deal with a constable hired by the mill owners than have no nearby law enforcement at all.

As long as people include stability and safety among their highest priorities the patronage system will have a place. It may move from one country to another as countries and societies develop, but as long as there are people whose needs are not being met by the government, there will be a call for someone else to fill that role. Wealthy individuals with the capital to provide necessary services for the peasant class of workers and enough capital to procure the land necessary to provide the agrarian system in place in most patronage systems will fill this role.

Whether or not people could leave a village in medieval Europe often depended on the specific village in which they lived. In the American South, there was often an option to leave, but not many viable places to which one could go. In

\[3\text{ Ibid., 262.}\]
both societies, a lack of viable alternatives served as a large factor to keep people in the patronage system.

    Patronage is generally seen in areas with little control from above a local level. It is not surprising then, that a patronage system would develop in the American South, a region distrustful of the federal government and who had just fought a war over the issue of states-rights. A patronage system which has an existence predicated by the lack of a strong government would thrive in an area that believed in giving the government as little power as possible.

    Because there has obviously been much research about the patronage system by academics such as Duby, Bloch, and Pirrene, it is difficult to say that their perception of the end of the patronage system is incorrect, but it is my belief that their perception of this system’s ending was a result of this system evolving and becoming hard to recognize as the same as the system they spent a large portion of their lives researching. Personal dependence has continued to evolve from the very beginning of the patronage system until today.

---

4 When discussing the basics causes of feudalism, F.L. Ganshof wrote that feudalism is created by “a dispersal of political authority amongst a hierarchy of persons who exercise in their own interest powers normally attributed to the state and which are often, in fact, derived from its breakup.” F.L. Ganshof, Feudalism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), XV.

5 It is only Marc Bloch who seems to agree that the patronage system of the Middle Ages was able to change, based on his ideas when he writes that, “(i)n some regions of France, we know, serfdom was maintained until modern times. But it only lasted by evolving.” Marc Bloch, Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 160; Rosener wrote that
The idea of this continuity between the different societies draws us back to the idea presented by Spengler of the “eternal peasant.” This idea of a common man similar throughout history is echoed by Guy Bois when he writes that, “(p)easant societies, whether ancient, medieval, or contemporary, are said to have a specific common logic, regardless of the constraints of surrounding society.”

Peasant societies, through the years, have shown that they have a commonality that ties them together. It is this peasant that was found in medieval Europe, and which was found when “(t)he mill and the textile industry needed the mill class, a steady supply of low-paid workers, to form the core of the mill work force.” It is this eternal everyman, along with many other similarities, which draw together the patronage systems of medieval Europe and the post-Civil War American South.

For several centuries in medieval Europe patronage served as the most obvious system of running small kingdoms. After this era its perceived importance began to fade, not because patronage was no longer a viable option, but was because patronage was evolving to meet new societal needs. Although it is rarely noticed, personal dependence…evolved over time and was not a static condition during the Middle Ages.” Rosener is correct that personal dependence evolved during the Middle Ages, but is not correct in limiting it to that time period. Werner Rosener, *Peasants In the Middle Ages* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 211.


when one puts the systems of patronage in medieval Europe and the American South side by side the similarities number a lot higher than the differences. Many scholars may choose to not recognize an evolved system of patronage as valid, but the working class members of one of these systems would likely recognize many similarities to what they experience on a daily basis. It is because of this that patronage, a system associated with the Middle Ages and Norman England, can be seen across agrarian societies into the modern day.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Anderson, Claude. Interview by Daniel Wegner, 1978, MSS 278, Clemson University Special Collections, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.


Gaillard, John. Interview by Daniel Wegner, 1978, MSS 278, Clemson University Special Collections, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.


120


