

Baptist, Edward. E. (2014). *The half has never been told : slavery and the making of American capitalism* . New York: Basic Books

I have long known that there is more to the legacy of slavery in the United States than I was taught in school. I knew that the legal slave trade ended in 1807 but that the exploitation of people of African descent has never completely ended, as evidenced by the mass incarceration and continued exploitation of people who are identified as black and brown.

Baptist explains how the kidnapping of Africans and the forced labor of those who survived was engineered to produce and re-produce the commodity-generating empire that we call the United States. The truth is that slavery was integral to the birth of American capitalism and so it was written into the US Constitution. The tobacco plantations of Virginia and the cotton plantations of Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana fed the banking and insurance systems of New York and New England. When it became cheaper to force enslaved people to reproduce rather than kidnap people from Africa, the sales and insurance industries exploded with new wealth - all built on the backs of stolen men and women and children. In the first half of the 19th century slave coffles of chained people were forced to walk from the plantations in Virginia and the Carolinas to the Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia to labor in cotton fields under conditions so extreme that the average death came in less than seven years.

Baptist describes the torture of the whip and the continual suffering. Families of African descent were regularly separated and members were sold on auction blocks. Terror was a tool and trauma was the result. Meanwhile, the insurance industry thrived; bonds were issued on the lives of laboring human beings and the Western world responded to the growth of American capital markets with confidence. Southern cotton built the Liverpool and Manchester cotton markets. The United States exported capitalism, on the backs of the enslaved.

While much of Baptist's research isn't new, the power of the book lies in the details with which he describes the systemic pattern of Black exploitation by every state in the United States. No state was exempt from this abuse of human beings in the creating of a capitalist empire. Baptist pays a lot of attention to "stealing". First, stealing people from Africa; then stealing their labor; then stealing their wives and fathers and children; and trying to steal their souls. Baptist writes, "Enslaved African Americans survived forced migration to the cotton South and then shaped the modern world through their labor, survival, and resistance [and this is] crucial to understanding our collective past, present, and future". (page 426) Baptist shows that slavery wasn't a footnote in American history but was, in fact, the essence of American capitalism.

How this book would work in groups

The history of race in the United States has shaped our lives and is enacted both consciously and unconsciously in groups. Group leaders would benefit from knowing the true story of this country in order to understand the trauma, resilience, and denial that arise when racial dynamics are present.

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