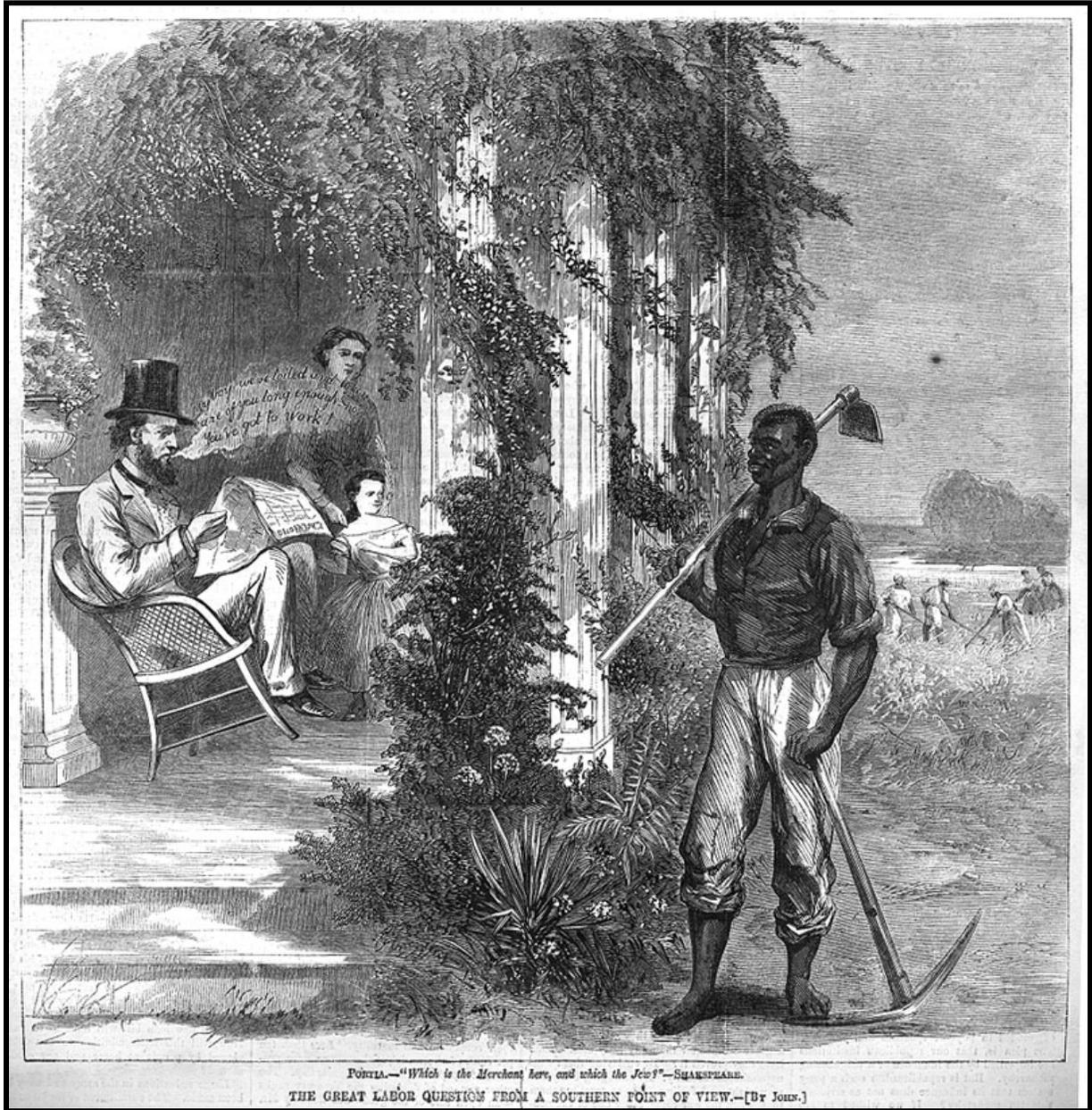


# Slave Owners



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## Slave Owners

The history of slavery in the American colonies began in 1619 when the first enslaved Africans were sold to residents of the Jamestown colony. Tobacco required large land holdings and working in the southern heat was oppressive to most European colonists.

By 1860, there were about 4 million slaves (and about ½ million free black people) in the United States; the slaves lived mostly in the 15 southern states. However, about 75% of southerners could not afford to purchase a slave. Most slave owners owned less than 10 slaves and less than 5% of white southerners were wealthy enough to own 20 slaves or more.

The largest, wealthiest plantation owners were known as “planters.” Non-slave owning farmers of the south wanted to be planters and thus supported the institution of slavery. Slave owners really became rich after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. Cotton productivity increased fifty times.

Most southern delegates to the Second Continental Congress (1776) were slave owners. They successfully removed a passage from the *Declaration of Independence*

condemning the king and Parliament for allowing the horrific “Slave Trade.”

Southern delegates to the Constitutional Convention (1787) argued that slaves should be counted in their population for purposes of representation in the new House of Representatives (the Three-Fifths Compromise). In addition, delegates decided to allow the new government to tax imports, including slaves, but forbid the Congress to consider other regulations against slavery until 1808 (the Slave Trade Compromise).

Southern planters asserted that Africans were better off because of slavery. They were fed, clothed, housed, and taught Christianity; life as an American slave was better than life as an African “savage.” Any movement or legislation against slavery was considered an attack on the southern way of life. To slave owners, the Missouri Compromise (1820) and the Compromise of 1850 were northern attempts to restrict slavery until it died. Abolitionists such as William Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) represented all northerners’ desire to end slavery altogether. John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry and Lincoln’s election as president were practically bugle calls for war.