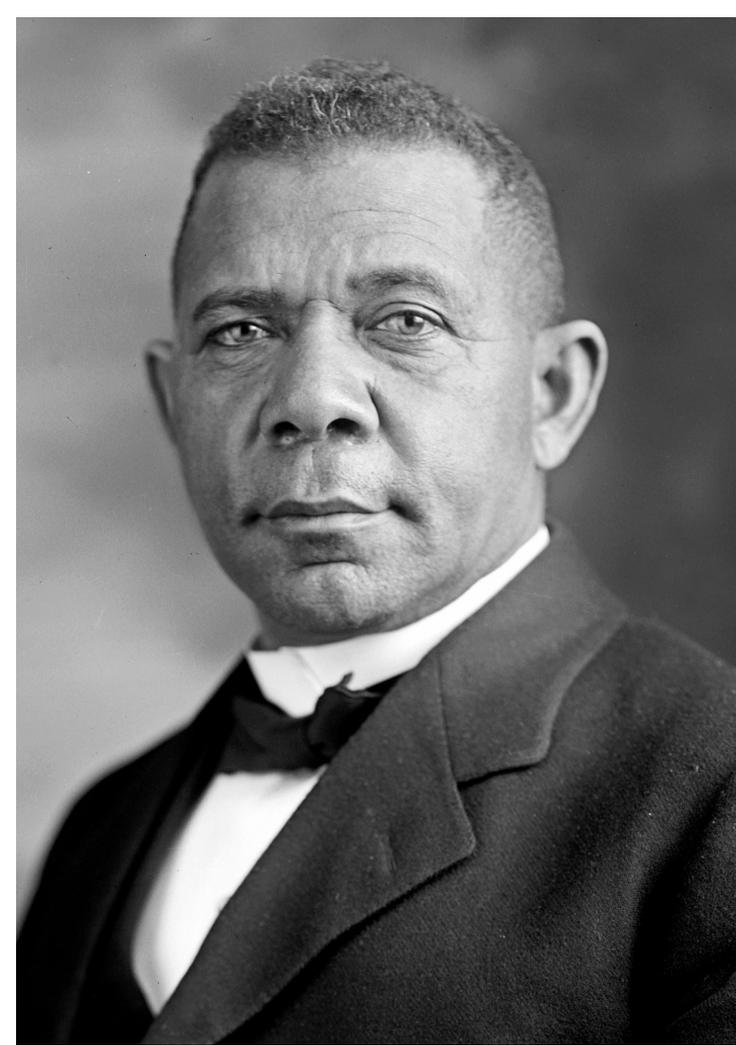




Atlantic World Case Study #1: Cotton

Week Eleven Lectures





The USA Civil War and Cotton Production

- The American Civil war raged on from 1861-1865, eventually leading to the passage of the 13th Amendment to the American constitution, which ended slavery throughout the country.
- As the United States was the largest cotton producer in the world, the civil war wreaked havoc on the price of cotton throughout the world. Places like India and Egypt and Russia sought to fill the gap
 - But After the Civil War, the American cotton industry picked back up again.
- As Germany had the largest textile industry in Europe, they were buyers of a lot of Cotton. And Germany cannot grow their own. The overwhelming majority of cotton, which was the basis of 1/15 of the German workforce's labour, came from the USA and India.
 - They wanted to make cotton growing a "German Industry"

The USA Civil War and Cotton Production

- According to Sven Beckert, in the wake of the American Civil War, "nearly 4 million slaves gained their freedom in the nation that dominated world cotton production, leading to fears among merchants and manufacturers that the disruption of the 'deep relationship between slavery and cotton production' might 'destroy one of the essential conditions of the mass production' of cotton textiles. . . . And by removing several million bales of cotton from global markets between 1861 and 1865, the war forced manufacturers to find new sources for their crucial raw material" (p. 1405-1406).
- "By paralyzing the dominant producer of the one of the industrial world's most important commodities, the Civil War brought to a climax the tensions within global capitalism as it had evolved during the first half of the 19th century and led to a paradoxical result: the liberation of 4 million slaves in North America and the extension and intensification of imperial control over potential cotton-growing regions in Asia and Africa" (p. 1406).

German Colonialism and Booker T. Washington

- It's not a coincidence that Germany obtained its colonies (Namibia, Togo, Tanzania, Cameroon, Samoa, etc.) in the 1880s, right after the American Civil War and the Emancipation of Slaves.
 - At the time, "Legitimate Trade" in Togo was mostly for Palm oil
- Germany sought to use its West African colony, Togo, as a site for cotton production, they just needed people to train the locals to grow cotton.
- Enter Booker T. Washington, a Prominent African-American educator, and the Director of the Tuskegee Institute of Industrial Education, in Alabama.
 - He was contacted by members of the German Colonial Industry Society, and they asked if he could get some of his staff to go to Togo to start a cotton industry.
- Booker T. Washington's concept of "civilization" and his notion of the "new Negro" led him to agree with many of the German colonial goals. Indeed, Booker T. Washington is a controversial individual.

Conflicting Notions of "Freedom"

- Germany wanted "freedom" from dependence on American cotton. They wanted to have a stable industrial workforce in Germany, and they didn't really care about the fate of the Togolese.
- Booker T. Washington and his people conceived of freedom as embeddedness in the global economy. If black people (African American, Togolese, it didn't matter), could become indispensable to the global economy, they will become "free" and can negotiate gradually for better conditions. Industrial Education was key.
- For the Togolese, while they had no problem in principle with growing cotton, they privileged subsistence farming. Growing Yams and Maize would feed the family even if the price of cash crops was low.
- Germany's policy of increasing commodity production at all costs was at odds with these in a way. While the Tuskegee workers appreciated the German's notion of "civilization", they did not appreciate the corporal punishment involved.