

Title: “All Men are Created Equal”: A Study of the Implications of Christianity on the Institution of Slavery from the Reformation to the Antebellum South

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Abstract: This paper explores Christian notions of equality from the Reformation to the Antebellum South. The spread of Protestant/evangelical Christianity across Europe and the Atlantic World shook many foundations upon which society was built. Among the key consequences was a major shift in the status quo. Class conflict became more intense with notions of equality some discovered within the pages of Scripture. This found its way into the ultimate class conflict of the Colonial and Antebellum periods, which was the system of chattel slavery. As more slaves became aware of the impropriety of their condition, masters feared the collapse of all they knew. Consequently, they countered these notions legally, but in doing so, further exposed the gross inequality. This paper explores how the concept of equality among classes, particularly among Christians, found its way across the Atlantic into the plantation system, and its implications for the slaves. It examines how the Reformation indirectly started class conflict everywhere it went, and even shook the foundations upon which slave labor was built. Many tried to resist these notions all throughout the early modern period, which climaxed in the Antebellum South. Nevertheless, the notion that God created everyone equal eventually prevailed over chattel slavery. This paper explores its history from the Protestant Reformation as opposed to simple explorations of Scripture and philosophical implications.