

# **Cotton Trade in the 19th century in Bremen**

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## **The development of the cotton trade in the 19th century in Bremen**

by

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## **1 Introduction**

On the following pages one will be able to learn a little more about the cotton trade and its development in Bremen in the 19th century. We focused on naming and discussing important events in the city's history, but also on cotton on general. But one question was always in mind: Why and how did Bremen become so successfully involved in the cotton trade and what measures helped forming the market?

In the first part of our work, we address the beginnings of Bremen's cotton trade and the rather unsold basis on which it was build on.

The second part is about slavery and its important and influential role in the cotton industry. Different work areas will also be explained, such as the classer's job. In our opinion, these topics are still relevant, because, also explained in this research, slavery and exploitation based in the cotton industry are still a daily occurrence.

The research itself was not very easy. Bremen's cotton trade reached its peak in the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In consequence, there is rarely any literature or sources about the first half of the century that we focused on. But after all, we tried the best we could to provide an overall picture of the cotton trade and its important role in Bremen in the 19th century.

## **2 Why Bremen became a cotton transshipment point**

### **2.1 How the emigration business is connected to the Bremen cotton trade**

A main step for the development of the Bremen cotton trade was Bremerhaven becoming the most important place to go for emigrants in Germany. In the 19th century the German emigration reached its climax. There were multiple reasons for this. On one hand, during the gradually increasing industrialization more and more workers and craftsmen were replaced with machines, in consequence the economic and social standards changed drastically and poverty and unemployment were a daily occurrence. On the other hand, health care was constantly improving. Diseases, that were usually fatal for the people could now be cured. The new medicine and developed antibiotics made their survival possible and led to an overpopulation in the cities. This increased the lack of jobs and mass unemployment was ruling on the streets. Desperate people were hoping of a brighter future in a foreign country.

Most of the emigrants went to North America until the beginning of World War I, approximately 90% of the emigrants were located in the United States of America.<sup>1</sup> Many of them were empowered in their decision because of reports on gold findings in California.

For Bremen and its port Bremerhaven, the misery and hopes of the people were the base of becoming a successful center of trade.

In many places, for example Hamburg or the Netherlands, the traveling of emigrants who wanted to continue their journey through the city's ports was hindered or even forbidden by the governments. They did not want to have to deal with people who had no money nor a home and were afraid, the emigrants would end up staying in the city at the expense of the government.<sup>2</sup>

Bremen in contrast was doing everything to support the emigrants. In Bremen, they were not seen as a profit-making commodity. They were seen as people in

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<sup>1</sup> Schmahl, Helmut: Die Auswanderung nach Nordamerika im 19. Jahrhundert. <http://www.auswanderung-rlp.de/auswanderung-nach-nordamerika/19-jahrhundert.html#> [Status 03.05.2014]

<sup>2</sup> Verein für Heimatpflege und Kultur Exten e.V.: Auswanderer. <http://www.heimatverein-exten.de/index.php/exten/historisches-exten/auswanderer> [Status 03.05.2014]

need for help who were in a miserable situation and because of that, are taking a brave step towards a new life.<sup>3</sup>

In 1832 the senate in Bremen passed a protective law regarding emigrants, which should clarify their rights. This act helped raising Bremen's reputation in the emigrant business even more and the city tried to boost it wherever it could.<sup>4</sup>

Provisions have been made to ensure that the emigration via Bremen was especially comfortable and affordable. The fare from the main emigration cities to Bremen, e.g. Hesse was brought down. Cheap housing and food was provided, the hoteliers got paid from the Bremen governments, so that they could lower the costs for the emigrants. Corporations were established, that concentrated only on the emigrant business and soon a new branch of business arose. There were travel agents, who arranged deals between emigrants and ship owners. Their co-workers travelled to cities with a high percentage of emigration and promoted Bremerhaven as the number one emigration port. Advertisements were in newspapers and on posters all over the cities.<sup>5</sup>

The benefits that Bremen got from the emigrant business were tremendous. In the 18th century, the Bremen wagoners, who brought goods from Bremen to cities all over the German states, often had to return either with half a load or no load at all, because there were no goods to bring from those cities to Bremen. In the long run, this was a losing deal. But now on the way back they were able to take Emigrants with them and made a lot of profit by demanding a little fare from every passenger.<sup>6</sup>

In downtown Bremen, the retail industry was profiting, too. The emigrants wanted to keep their luggage as small and light as possible, which meant they bought every essential and necessity right before boarding. Merchants were able to sell their products at a very high cost because the products were in huge demand among the emigrants anyway. Without all these different aspects of the emigration business and the changes that were made, Bremen would have never become as important in the cotton trade as it was a few decades later.

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<sup>3</sup> Fuhse, Georg (1927): Die Wirtschaftsgeschichte von Bremen bis ins 19. Jahrhundert, S. 155f.

<sup>4</sup> Fuhse, S.156

<sup>5</sup> Grams, Wolfgang: Auswanderer ABC. <http://www.routes.de/b.html> [Status 03.05.2014]

<sup>6</sup> Fuhse, S.155.

Around 1800 there were no significant shipyards at the Weser. But through the emigrants, the shipowners got so wealthy, they did not have to rely on ships that were sent from the Netherlands anymore. They started to build their own shipyards and economies, which later on were very important for the cotton trade. Numerous ships were built, always better<sup>7</sup> and bigger until almost all of the emigrants were traveling on Bremen ships to the United States. When the ships then came back to Bremen, they were usually empty, which meant unnecessary costs. But the shipowners already made enough profit through the emigrants, that they were able to offer shipping space very cheaply. Soon, the returning ships primarily brought cotton to Bremen.<sup>8</sup> They were able to fully load the ships without raising costs for fuel or exceeding the maximum weight.

Cotton was a light staple good and therefore could be handled, loaded and transported easily and at low cost. Another important advantage for the Bremen cotton trade was that there were also a lot of Bremen merchants among the emigrants. They settled at the coast in the North American seaports and were now able to operate directly with their former countrymen.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.2 How Bremen became a cotton metropole**

At this point of my assignment, I intentionally wanted to discuss the advantages which Bremen had over other commercial cities, that made it the number one transit point for cotton shipments. However while I was researching, I discovered that there is nothing really, that would have made Bremen superior to the other cities. For that reason, in this text I will focus a little more on the general development of the cotton trade in Bremen.

At the end of the 17th century, the cotton industry was mostly located in Southern Germany. The Mediterranean Sea was one of the fundamental channels of trade. Bremens primary imports consisted of wine and vinegar from France and there were hardly any raw materials passing through, because 80 percent of the German

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<sup>7</sup> They got more comfortable and soon sailing ships were replaced by steamships

<sup>8</sup> Fuhse, S.157.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffmann, Wiebke: Auswandern und Zurückkehren, S. 82.

population were agricultural laborers. They were able to produce their own wool, which at that time was the material that their clothing was made of.<sup>10</sup>

A couple centuries later, the industrialization hit Germany as hard as every other European country. The continental barrier forced Germany to establish its own, independent textile industry. At the same time, the cotton demand increased consistently because the farmers, who before, had herded their sheep now had to work in the factories. More and more people moved from the urban hinterland into the cities and Bremen as a trading place was very limited.

Compared to Hamburg, Bremen was located at a rather small and shallow river, the Weser. Also over time, the Weser was silting-up, until less and less ships could travel on it. In the beginning, Bremen received the goods at Vegesack, but for the same reason this was soon impossible.<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> Thereupon, the former mayor of Bremen, Johann Smidt, took the, from the economical point of view, probably most important step in the city's history. In 1827 he bought a circa 70-hectare area at a cost of 74.000 golden taler. It was located where the river Geeste flows into the Weser, present day's Bremerhaven. On top of that, acting upon his advice, the city invested approximately 200.000 golden taler in new, very modern and advanced harbor facilities.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the recently achieved independence of the United States of America, the transatlantic trade's importance was increasing rapidly. By no means Bremen was at a bad location compared to other German port cities.

But this alone was not the reason for Bremen to become one of the top players in cotton trade.<sup>14</sup> During the wave of emigration numerous Bremen merchants went to the United States and strengthened their bond with Bremen. <sup>15</sup>

And when more and more people settled overseas, Bremen companies were founded which were able to directly trade with the companies in Bremen.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Beutin, Ludwig (1934): Von 3 Ballen zum Weltmarkt, p.9ff.

<sup>11</sup> Garbrecht, Günther (2000): Der Kampf gegen die Versandung der Weser. <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~bremhist/VersandWeser.html> [Status 04.05.2014]

<sup>12</sup> Fuhse, S.112.

<sup>13</sup> Fuhse, S.112ff.

<sup>14</sup> Beutin, S.6.

<sup>15</sup> Read Chapter 1.1 for more information about emigration.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffmann, Wiebke: Auswandern und Zurückkehren, p. 82ff.

Still, the question why Hamburg did not outshine Bremen is yet to be answered. After all Hamburg always had the bigger port and better connections to the hinterland. There are multiple reasons. On one hand, Hamburg imposed high duties on cotton, which made it almost impossible for the minor tradesmen to trade with it, because it was too expensive. On the other hand, the train to Bremen and away from Bremen was approximately 25% cheaper than to and away from Hamburg.<sup>17</sup> And in the end a severe commercial crisis in 1857 carried many trade cities off. However Bremen remained almost entirely undamaged and recovered from it a lot faster than many other cities. Bremen had limited itself to shipyards and mercantile trade and was not, like Hamburg, simultaneously active in the bank and exchange business. This meant that Bremen, before the other cities were able to recover, had already driven its trading business forward.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Beutin, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Beutin, p. 24.

### 3 Obstacles and barriers

#### 3.1 Problems that occurred within the textile industry

There were multiple obstacles and problems, which the worldwide textile industry had to overcome to establish a functioning, international cotton market.

Cotton is originally a tropical raw material, therefore it needs a lot of sun and water. But to be able to harvest cotton as white and as clean as possible, the capsules must not get in contact with rain or otherwise they would decay.<sup>19</sup> This means, the cotton must be cultivated in very dry areas, where it needs artificial irrigation. Even in regions where water is scarce, thousands of liters are used on cotton farms on a daily basis, not regarding the resident population. As a consequence there are often drinking water deficiencies. To illustrate this a little further: For a single cotton shirt an average amount of 2000 liters of water are used.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the time it takes to work with this important raw material and the strength and stamina that are needed are immense. The picking of cotton on the plantations could take up to a quarter of a year. The capsules do not ripen equally, but often one after another.

Also the physical load on the workers was enormous. Because, as has been pointed out, cotton only grows in the hottest driest areas, which made working on the plantations hardly bearable, since there was no shade at all.

In the factory buildings that were most times only sporadic and consisting of metal plates, it was muggy and the heat was maddening.<sup>21</sup>

But not only the raw material itself hindered the progress. Also the different industries in the countries that were trading cotton caused problems. At the very beginning of the upcoming cotton industry, wearing cotton fabrics became a crime because the cotton took jobs from the people in the wool industry. Weavers, who

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<sup>19</sup> Zischka, Anton (1940): Der Kampf um die Weltmacht Baumwolle, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> www.biothemen.de: Baumwolle und Umweltprobleme. <http://www.baumwoll-seite.de/Baumwolle/aralsee.html> [Status 06.05.2014]

<sup>21</sup> Zischka, p. 93.

processed the cotton, often had to pay a fine of about 5 sterling pounds, merchants who traded with cotton had to pay up to 20 sterling pounds. There were also fines for burying a dead person in a cotton instead of a wool cloth. But in 1760, when English government saw the ability to make a huge profit with cotton, the laws were history.<sup>22</sup>

In the beginning of the 19th century, the technologies invented by English men, e.g. Arkwright's Water frame Spinning machine, were protected carefully by the English textile industry. They wanted to prevent the inventions from reaching the European main land, so that other countries would still be depending on the English production. Ports were monitored and ships that were either coming from abroad or were heading there were searched for the technologies. Experienced textile workers, who may have been able to rebuild the machines, were stopped from emigrating and people from other European countries were not allowed to visit the textile factories.<sup>23</sup>

When the United States of America started to see cotton as an aspiring raw material and source of capital, they tried to form their own industry. But England was not willing to watch the achievements of a new competitor on the market. In previous years, the country had earned a lot of money through trading and processing of cotton and because of overproduction had stored big amounts of cotton. This enabled them to dump large quantities of cotton in the United States of America. The American market was flooded by cheap English products which whom their own companies could not keep up with. They had no chance of persisting without suffering heavy losses and had to close one after another.

In 1820 the alleged victory of England was achieved. But soon the English industry had to face a crisis. Because of the closures in America, the remaining cotton was now sold for knocked-down prices on the European market. England incurred severe losses. In 1826, almost three times as much bankruptcies were reported compared to previous years. The number rose from 1300 to 3300 a year. The local workers' wages dropped below the subsistence level, working hours were often extended without payment.<sup>24</sup> While the situation was worsening, the

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<sup>22</sup> Zischka, p. 38ff.

<sup>23</sup> Zischka, p. 60f.

<sup>24</sup> Zischka, p. 66ff.

English industry had to admit that in the long run only international and liberal trade was lucrative. In 1838 the „Anti-Corn Law League“ was founded by cotton spinner John Bright and calico manufacturer Richard Cobden. The two men travelled through the country and delivered public speeches, in which they campaigned for a free market and international exchange of goods.<sup>25 26</sup>

The first step towards a global market was done.

The German states were not overrun by England like the United States. Thankfully, they recognized the danger early enough to be able to raise tariff walls against the English products. Nevertheless, the conflict between the United States of America and England and the ongoing price war caused severe price fluctuation.<sup>27</sup> These also affected the development of the Bremen cotton trade. The merchants often found it to be too risky to invest in cotton, since the price could rise or drop within a few weeks. If someone had bought a couple hundred bales, it would have been possible that he can not resell them because there were already cheaper offers on the market. Not before the Nations settled their differences, Bremen could start importing cotton on a grand scale.

Around that time, with the beginnings of industrialization, another problem occurred. From today's point of view it probably seems worse than at the time in which it was a daily occurrence: child labor. More and more manual laborers were replaced by machines and workers were needed, who could do easy chores for low wages and were small enough to be able to climb into the machines. Children between the ages of 5 to 8 were particularly suitable, because the work could be learned easily. Their responsibilities included opening and cleaning the cotton capsules, changing the bobbins in the machines and cleaning them, too.<sup>28</sup> The children were always in great danger when working with the machines and there were numerous threats: sudden or early death due to overwork, mutilation and invalidity or chronic respiratory diseases due to the dusty air in the factory buildings. Not until the 1830s, when the machines became more complex and

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<sup>25</sup> Bergius, Carl Julius (1861): Die Abschaffung der Korngesetze und der Schutzzölle in England, p.11ff.

<sup>26</sup> Zischka, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Zischka, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Just, Franziska: Von der Handspindel zur Textilfabrik - Textilarbeit im Wandel der Jahrtausende. [http://wirsberg-gymnasium.de/files/g\\_indu\\_6.pdf](http://wirsberg-gymnasium.de/files/g_indu_6.pdf) [Status 05.05.2014]

further developed, meaning that they could not be handled by children anymore, there were first protection provisions against child labor. At this point many children had died in the machines and others were incapable of working, which meant they had no perspective.<sup>29</sup>

### **3.2 Setbacks and time dependency**

The first reason for the delayed development of the Bremen cotton trade was Napoleons French Empire. During the Napoleonic wars<sup>30</sup> a fierce dispute between England and Napoleon led to an economic disaster. In the beginning, Napoleon tried to defeat the English through military action, but it did not take long until he had to admit that the French Empire did not have a chance conquering the English navy. On the 21st October 1805 the French fleet was totally destroyed during the battle of Trafalgar, lead by admiral Nelson, an English naval commander. Napoleon was defeated and had to search for another way to take England down. He plans the complete economic ruin of his opponent.<sup>31</sup> Through isolation from the rest of the world, Napoleon hopes to weaken and eventually defeat England. One year after the battle, on the 21st November 1806, Napoleon issued the Berlin Decree. The decree forbade all the countries that were allied with England, the import of English goods. All French harbors were closed for English ships. Soon followed Prussia and Austria and eventually the rest of Western and Eastern Europe.<sup>32</sup> The British could not sell their goods on the mainland and everyone who traded with them had to fear financial penalties. British exports were falling between 25% to 55%. For the Bremen trade this meant loosing their most important trading partner and suffering from the loss of many jobs and livelihoods.

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<sup>29</sup> Bönig, Jürgen: Zur Geschichte der Kinderarbeit in Deutschland und Europa. <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/146095/zur-geschichte-der-kinderarbeit?p=all> [Status 05.05.2014]

<sup>30</sup> A series of wars between Napoleon's French Empire and opposing coalitions led by Great Britain

<sup>31</sup> Speedy a.o.: Trafalgar! <http://www.trafalgar1805.de> [Status 08.05.2014]

<sup>32</sup> Stuhr, Friedrich (1906): Die Napoleonische Kontinentalsperre in Mecklenburg, p. 2f.

But all of these measures did not hurt England as much as Napoleon would have hoped. The production decreased and England was lacking an important market, but after all, the European economy, including the German, suffered much more from the Continental Blockade. England reacted to the blockade by also blocking the import of all European goods and smuggle became more intensive than ever before. The cotton trade in Bremen, with England as its most important trading partner, rested completely.<sup>33</sup> Even though Germany was able to develop their own textile industry, thanks to the missing competition, the harbors did not profit from the blockade at all. In 1809 the German North Sea Coast became French territory and trade was brought to a standstill.<sup>34</sup> Finally in 1813 the Continental Blockade disappeared simultaneously to the end of Napoleons power and it seems like the problems should have been gone, too.<sup>35</sup>

But soon Bremen had to overcome the next blow. While England was sealed off from the rest of Europe, it still overproduced big amounts of goods which were now flooding Europe. They were sold so cheap, that until 1818 most of the German factories broke down. Bremen had no chance of selling their goods at such low cost and again, the cotton trade decreased for two years. In 1820, Prussia ,the leading state in Germany, invented a protection policy, which should, similar to the Continental Blockade, protect the German states from English goods. But it was not able to stand up against the Great Power of England.

The main reason for this was the division of Germany many different states and kingdoms, so that there was no stable internal German market. Developing this functioning internal market was one of the most important steps for the German economy. For the Bremen cotton traders this meant finally having a broad market within the German States. This was achieved, when the “Zollverein“ or German Customs Union was developed in 1833 and came into effect on New Year’s Day in 1834. The tariff walls and economic boundaries disappeared almost everywhere in the German states. And before uniting the German states politically, they were united economically.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Beutin, p. 13f.

<sup>34</sup> Beutin, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Stuhr, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Beutin, p. 15f.

A new era of trade began. For the Bremen cotton trade there is to know, that the Hanseatic cities, to which Bremen belonged as well, were not included in the Zollverein. They wanted to keep their economically exceptional positions. Hamburg and Bremen did not join until the 1880s.

The last problem I would like to mention is the industrialization. It was both a blessing and a curse. On one hand the new technologies<sup>37</sup> were the reason for the cheap cotton prizes, but on the other hand they brought a wave of social evil and many livelihoods were endangered. This caused the big wave of emigration sweeping the German states, mentioned in chapter 1.1.

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<sup>37</sup> Read chapter 3.1. for more information about the technologies.

## 4 Strong world competition

### 4.1 Reasons for the monopolization of the textile industry in England

Since the Late Middle Ages the wool production and processing already played a major role in the English economy. Most of the workers who were active in this industry settled in the county of Lancashire. Later, this region became the center of the world's textile production. Lancashire includes the industrial center Manchester and the port of Liverpool, as can be seen on the map<sup>38</sup>.

In the 1760s, the wool industry gained importance, so that more and more wool was brought to Lancashire. But there were not enough spinners to please the ever growing

market for textiles. Because of the labor deficiency, the British "Society of Arts" arranged a competition. The prize should belong to the party which developed a revolutionary spinning machine. There was only one condition: It should be able to spin six yarns at a time, while it only needs one person to handle it. The hand weaver James Hargreaves developed thereupon the world's first spinning machine: the Spinning-Jenny.<sup>39</sup>

It came particularly timely since right about then the import of cotton began to expand. With the time saving, the cotton could easily be processed and the workers of Lancashire were able to keep up with the growing import figures. It was already the beginning of a thriving cotton industry while the rest of Europe, including Germany, was still weaving by hand.



Map of Lancaster Shire from 1717

<sup>38</sup> 1717 John Lenthall. 'Lancaster Shire' copied, from Robert Morden (second state), from Lenthall's pack of playing cards (London, first state, 1717).

<sup>39</sup> Ziegler, Dieter: Die Industrialisierung. <http://www.wbg-weltgeschichte.de/leseprobe1101/> [Status 13.05.2014]

Soon after this first breakthrough, the „Water frame“ spinning machine was invented by Richard Arkwright. It was water-powered and almost fully automatic. There was just one problem. The yarn produced with this machine was too thick and rough for the modern, finely spun fabrics.<sup>40</sup>

Then, in the end of the 1770s, a man named Samuel Crompton succeeded by combining the concepts of the Spinning-Jenny and the Water frame spinning machine. He developed a machine called “Mule“ or “Mule-Jenny“. The name was chosen because a mule is what comes out when a horse and a donkey are mating. The horse stands for the Spinning-Jenny and the donkey for the Water frame. The Mule was fully automatic and spun superfine. It qualified for the global market and was one of the main reasons why England, or rather Lancashire, was able to establish their lead over the rest of Europe.<sup>41</sup>

The english machine-spun yarns flooded the European market and many other parts of the world. The English were able to maintain their technological advantage for quite a while because they protected their inventions very well.<sup>42</sup> Germany, among many other countries, depended on the English fabrics and Lancashire was more successful than ever before.

Another important advantage was that before the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the following revolutionary wars, England had colonial possessions in North America. For example, in 1763 England annexed Mississippi<sup>43</sup>, which later on became the center of the cultivation of cotton.<sup>44</sup> The English settled in the colonies and the population density increased. Even though technically, when the hype surrounding cotton started, the English did not have American colonies anymore, the fact that there were so many English people living in the cotton regions helped a lot. It facilitated the cotton trade between the English merchants in Lancashire and their fellow countrymen overseas. The importance of a

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<sup>40</sup> Simkin, John: The Water Frame. <http://spartacus-educational.com/TEXframe.htm> [Status 13.05.2014]

<sup>41</sup> Ziegler, Dieter: Die Industrialisierung. <http://www.wbg-weltgeschichte.de/leseprobe1101/> [Status 13.05.2014]

<sup>42</sup> Read chapter 2.1. for further information.

<sup>43</sup> Haynes, Robert V. : Mississippi Under British Rule - British West Florida. <http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/66/mississippi-under-british-rule-british-west-florida> [Status 14.05.2014]

<sup>44</sup> Dattel, Eugene R. : Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860). <http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/161/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860> [Status 14.05.2014]

confederate at the source should not be underestimated, especially in times of shortage of raw materials.

## **4.2 Bremen's dependence on goods from overseas**

In order for Bremen and the Bremen merchants to reach the outstanding position in the field of raw cotton trade, there were a two conditions to be met. The first one was the development of the need for raw materials within the German industry. The second was the formation and growth of the American cotton export in order to be routed via the Bremen port.

In the 18th century, a few cotton bales were coming on-again-off-again to Bremen, but never a significant amount. The cotton came through England from India. England was on the way of becoming the first industrial power, mainly because of their cotton industry while in the German states, linen and flax were the most important textile products. It would have not been possible for Bremen to reach Lancashires impact on the world market.<sup>45</sup>

In 1883 the United States of America achieved independence with the Treaty of Paris, which ended the revolutionary wars.<sup>46</sup> The same year the first ships sailed to Bremen from North America, but they did not have cotton on board. That is because in that time, there was not a lot of cotton cultivation in the USA.<sup>47</sup> The states did not even have enough to satisfy their own needs. For Bremen to become a globally acting city, the Americans had yet to introduce cotton as one of their main trading commodities.<sup>48</sup>

Germany was one of the countries that had the highest cotton consumption. The circumstances under which cotton has to grow were already explained<sup>49</sup> and looking at them, it is clear that Bremen had to depend on a southern country, in this case the USA.

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<sup>45</sup> Beutin, p. 9ff.

<sup>46</sup> Author unknown: Treaty of Paris. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=6> [Status 20.05.2014]

<sup>47</sup> The USA exported mainly tobacco, wood, a.o.

<sup>48</sup> Beutin, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Read chapter 2.1 for more information about the circumstances under which cotton grows.

Since the late 17th century there was no dress code laid down by the state anymore. All of the sudden, people dressed to represent their wealth and their status in the society, not only to keep warm. Because of the ever changing fashion in the 19th century, the demand for raw cotton was immense. There were four significant types of fashion between 1800 and 1900. First came the Empire style, only natural colors were used and the dresses had plunging necklines. When Napoleon was defeated everything changed and the Biedermeier period began. The dresses were now very conservative, mostly in dark colors and had no open neckline at all. Then, totally different again, was the second Rococo. The rich ladies wanted to show their wealth through their clothing with lots and lots of layers and embroidery. And finally the Gruenderzeit began and brought another complete change in fashion. Tight mermaid dresses replaced the crinoline. All of these changes meant throwing tons of clothes away and starting completely new and every time, more and more cotton was needed.<sup>50</sup>

In the 18th century, it would have been too expensive for the average population to buy cotton products, but when the United States began selling the cotton comparatively cheap the products became affordable and the market grew. Cotton ran short and the ports in Europe needed good connections to overseas to get as much cotton as they needed. Fortunately, as explained earlier<sup>51</sup>, Bremen had created those kinds of connections through the emigrant business. While many other ports did not get the number of bales they needed to maintain the cotton trade, Bremen's import increased continuously.

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<sup>50</sup> Author unknown: Die Mode im 19. Jahrhundert <http://home.arcor.de/moonlight-shadowcastle/fashion/19.jhgeschi.htm> [Status 20.05.2014]

<sup>51</sup> Read 1.1 for more information about the emigrant business.

## 4 Der Sezessionskrieg und dessen Folgen

*„Man kann wohl sagen, dass der Materielle Wohlstand in Europa an einem Baumwollenen Faden hängt. Würde die Sklaverei plötzlich aufgehoben, so fiel mit einem Schlage die Baumwollproduktion um 5/6 und alle Baumwollindustrien wären ohne weiteres ruiniert.“*<sup>52</sup>

Dieser Satz stammt aus einem Artikel des Bremer Handelsblattes aus dem Jahre 1853. Das Handelsblatt war eine Tageszeitung von Kaufleuten für Kaufleute und befasste sich vor allem mit Handelsinformationen. Dem ersten Satz kann man entnehmen, dass Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts die Baumwolle das wichtigste Handelsgut Europas war. Gleichzeitig unterstreicht der Autor mit Hilfe des Baumwollenen Fadens an Stelle des "Seidenen Fadens" den Wert der Baumwolle, indem er sie mit der kostbaren Seide gleichsetzt. Im nächsten Satz bringt er seine Besorgnis zum Ausdruck, dass die Abschaffung der Sklaverei, welche zu dieser Zeit diskutiert wurde, einen Einbruch in der Baumwollwirtschaft nach sich ziehen würde. Dies entsprach der allgemeinen Meinung der Bremer Kaufleute.<sup>53</sup>

Die Sklavenfrage machte eine der wichtigsten Diskussionen innerhalb der Weltpolitik aus. Europa war nahezu einheitlich gegen die Sklaverei, doch Bremen teilte diese Meinung nicht. Wie schon erwähnt, war Bremen auf die, von den Südstaaten der USA kommende, Baumwolle angewiesen.<sup>54</sup> Bremen bezog seine Baumwolle von den Südstaaten der USA, zu denen North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana und Mississippi gehörten.<sup>55</sup> Dort waren vor allem die Baumwollbauern auf die Sklaverei angewiesen. Hier gab es nicht genug Freiwillige, die stundenlang in der Hitze unter extremen Bedingungen arbeiten wollten. Hätten Sie die Löhne erhöht, hätte dies den Baumwollpreis in die Höhe getrieben und die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit geschmälert. Diese Probleme

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<sup>52</sup> Auszug aus dem Bremer Handelsblatt von 1853, zitiert nach Beutin, Ludwig: Von 3 Ballen zum Weltmarkt, S. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Beutin, S. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Lesen Sie Kapitel 3.2 für mehr Informationen.

<sup>55</sup> Sasse, Stefan: Der amerikanische Bürgerkrieg. <http://geschichts-blog.blogspot.de/2010/11/der-amerikanische-buergerkrieg.html> [Stand 21.05.2014]

waren durch die Sklaverei gelöst worden. Die aus Afrika verschleppten Menschen erhielten überhaupt keinen Lohn und wurden einfach zur Arbeit gezwungen.

Das Prinzip der Sklavenarbeit war allerdings allen politischen und ökonomischen Überzeugungen der Nordstaaten entgegengesetzt. Zudem standen die beiden Teile der USA sich in mehreren wirtschaftlichen Bereichen gegenüber: Im Norden herrschte die Industrie, im Süden die Großlandwirtschaft. Kapitalismus konkurrierte mit agrarischem Feudalismus und demokratische Städte standen auf Sklaven angewiesenen Gutsbesitzern gegenüber. Noch dazu kam, dass der Süden freien Handel betrieb, während im Norden die Schutzzollanhänger dominierten.<sup>56</sup>

Als Abraham Lincoln im Jahr 1860 zum Präsidenten gewählt wurde, ging er aktiv gegen die Sklaverei vor. Konflikte entstehen zwischen der Konföderation der Südstaaten und der Union der Nordstaaten und spitzte sich im Zuge der Sklavenfrage zu. Kurz vor Ausbruch des Sezessionskrieges soll der Bremische Ministerpräsident in Washington, Dr. Rudolf Schleiden, versucht haben den Streit zwischen Nord und Süd zu schlichten, denn auch er wusste von den Auswirkungen, die ein Krieg auch auf Bremen haben würde. Es gelang ihm nicht.<sup>57</sup>

Am 12. April 1861 um ca. 4:30 Uhr begann der Amerikanische Bürgerkrieg mit dem Beschuss von Fort Sumters durch die in der Konföderation vereinigten Südstaaten. Und die Befürchtungen der Bremer Händler bewahrheiteten sich. Während des Krieges machte die Stadt unglaubliche Verluste. Riesige Vorräte an Baumwolle, worunter sich wahrscheinlich auch Bremisches Eigentum befand, wurden zerstört. Man verbrannte die Ballen in den Südstaaten oft absichtlich, damit sie nicht in die Hände der Union fielen. Nach Europa verschiffen konnte man sie nicht mehr, weil die Union der Nordstaaten Seebarrieren errichtet hatte. Als New Orleans eingenommen wurde, ein Haupthandelspartner Bremens, verbrannten hunderttausende Ballen.<sup>58</sup>

Bald schon zogen die Preise an. Anfangs profitierte Bremen davon, denn die Händler konnten ihre Vorräte in kürzester Zeit und zu hohen Preisen verkaufen. Schnell herrschte in der Industrie ein Mangel an Baumwolle. Sie kam nicht mehr

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<sup>56</sup> Beutin, S.24f.

<sup>57</sup> Beutin, S. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Beutin, S. 25.

an genügend Baumwolle heran und 1862, im zweiten Jahr des Sezessionskriegs, wurden nur 40-50% ihres Bedarfs gedeckt.<sup>59</sup> Doch dann ging es auch mit dem Bremer Handel abwärts. Die Preise und die Versorgung wurden unsicher. Man konnte nicht mehr darauf vertrauen, dass man die bestellte Baumwolle auch erhalten würde und der Baumwollhandel wurde riskant.<sup>60</sup>

Noch dazu setzte bald eine Rohstoffknappheit ein. Im ersten Jahr des Krieges, 1861, ernteten die Südstaaten noch ca. 4,5 Millionen Ballen Baumwolle. Drei Jahre später waren es nur noch 300 Tausend Ballen.<sup>61</sup>

Zeitgleich sanken auch die Einfuhrzahlen in Bremen stark:<sup>62</sup>

1861	510 965	Zentner
1862	115 736	"
1863	98 556	"
1864	113 847	"

Alle sehnten ein schnelles Ende des Krieges herbei und wollten die Hoffnung nicht aufgeben, bald wieder von Amerika beliefert zu werden. Die Baumwolle von dort war besser und reichlicher als die aus Indien und man wollte sich in Bremen nicht den Aufwand betreiben, eine Handelsverbindung nach Asien aufzubauen, welche kurze Zeit später wieder unnütz werden würde.

Bremen verlor in dieser Zeit seine Vormachtstellung und Unabhängigkeit in der Baumwollbranche, für die die Stadt und ihre Kaufleute Jahrzehnte lang gekämpft hatten. Man wurde wieder von Liverpool bzw. Lancashire abhängig. Der einzige Halt in dieser Situation war, dass das Umland sich schon an Bremen als Baumwolllieferant gewöhnt hatte und weiterhin die Baumwolle aus der Stadt bezog. So konnte die Abnahme der über Bremen kommenden Baumwolle durch Preiserhöhungen wenigstens wieder ein bisschen ausgeglichen werden.

Am 9. April 1865 war ging der Krieg zu Ende. Die Konföderierten hatten kapituliert und die Sklaverei in den USA wurde endgültig verboten.<sup>63</sup> Doch dies

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<sup>59</sup> Beutin, S. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Beutin, S. 26.

<sup>61</sup> Zischka, S.76.

<sup>62</sup> Tabelle entnommen aus Beutin, S.26.

<sup>63</sup> Detsch, Roland: Amerikanischer Bürgerkrieg. [http://www.cpw-online.de/kids/amerikanischer\\_buergerkrieg.htm](http://www.cpw-online.de/kids/amerikanischer_buergerkrieg.htm) [Stand 21.05.2014]

war nicht das Ende des Kampfes um den Erhalt von Bremen als Baumwollumschlagplatz. Es war ein großer Nachteil, dass Bremen mit den Südstaaten gehandelt hatte. Zum Vergleich: Hamburg hatte sich auf das Geschäft mit den Nordstaaten spezialisiert und musste wesentlich weniger Verluste ertragen. Viele Anbauflächen in den USA waren durch Kriegsverwüstungen zerstört, viel Land wurde verödet.<sup>64</sup> Als es dann wieder genug Land zum Anpflanzen gab, verhinderte überall der Mangel an Arbeitskräften eine schnelle Entwicklung bzw. Erholung der Baumwollindustrien. „Freiwillig wollten die Schwarzen nicht auf die Felder.“<sup>65</sup> und die Gestehungskosten<sup>66</sup> stiegen.<sup>67</sup>

Kurz nach Ende des Krieges sanken die Baumwollpreise kurz, weil man Vorräte in den USA vermutete, die nach Aufhebung aller Blockaden billig auf dem Europäischen Markt verkauft würden. Dem war aber nicht so. Man hatte die Anzahl der Ballen überschätzt und als dies bemerkt wurde, stiegen die Preise schnell stark an. Nach der Aufregung sanken sie zwar wieder ein wenig, aber die Unsicherheit bei den Einkäufern blieb. Das Auf und Ab der Preise lässt sich mit der Zeit vergleichen, in der die USA und England sich gegenseitig mit Schleuderpreisen in den Ruin zu treiben versuchten.<sup>68</sup> Auch die Industrie war kein zuverlässiger Abnehmer mehr für die Bremer Baumwollhändler. Sie verarbeitete nach dem Krieg massenhaft Baumwolle, um den Mangel der letzten Jahre auszugleichen. Doch der Bedarf war kleiner als gedacht und es kam zu einer Überproduktion. In der Folge kaufte die Industrie fast gar keine Baumwolle mehr an und die Einfuhrzahlen wurden entsprechend nach unten angepasst, bis sie wieder das Niveau von Kriegszeiten erreicht hatten. Und vorerst verlor der Bremer Baumwollhandel an Bedeutung.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> [http://www.cpw-online.de/kids/amerikanischer\\_buergerkrieg.htm](http://www.cpw-online.de/kids/amerikanischer_buergerkrieg.htm)

<sup>65</sup> Zischka, S. 93

<sup>66</sup> Kosten für Fertigung, Herstellung oder Anschaffung der Baumwolle.

<sup>67</sup> Zischka, S.80.

<sup>68</sup> In Kapitel 2.1 finden Sie mehr Informationen.

<sup>69</sup> Beutin, S. 28.

## 6 Cotton in general

### 6.1 Rise of the cotton trade

*“Cotton is such a commonplace material now that we forget that it was once extremely precious – more valuable than silk. But then in the 17th century, the East India Company began importing calicoes from India (from the city of Calicut, from which they take their name), and suddenly cotton became affordable.”*<sup>70</sup>

What made cotton such an attractive commodity that founding a cotton-exchange seemed an attractive and worthwhile venture? There was a tremendous demand for cotton, long before fashion increased its pace and made constant buying necessary. A description of women’s clothing in the mid-nineteenth century, again from Bill Bryson’s book helped me to imagine what all this cotton was made into: Women wore a knee-length chemise, a camisole, half a dozen petticoats (maximum), a corset and drawers – altogether weighing up to 40 pounds.... Compared to all other known and affordable fabrics, cotton was light, yet robust, and pleasant on the skin. With more and more people living in cities and dressing more after fashion than tradition, people were buying cotton at a rate production and trade could hardly keep up with.

So the demand was there, but production was complicated. Originally producing cotton textiles, from the picking through spinning and finally weaving, was a labour-intensive, complicated and therefore expensive process. There were several changes which by the 19th century had made cotton really lucrative for merchants: technical inventions that were part of the industrialisation made mass-production possible. The increase of slave-labour was the other factor that kept cotton cheap and raised the demand for it. Without these factors the Bremer Baumwollbörse would never have been founded.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Bryson, Bill: At Home: A short history of private life. 66%.

<sup>71</sup> Bryson, 66%.

## 6.2 Technical innovations

Spinning describes the technique of turning short cotton fibres into long spools of thread, weaving means interlacing two sets of strings or fibres at right angles to make a mesh on a loom. Spinning, which traditionally was the work of women, and weaving, traditionally the work of men, were cottage industries and employed a large number of people. Many of them lost their work, when one invention after the other made the industrial production of cotton possible and profitable:

The first step was the “flying shuttle”, invented by John Kay in 1733. It doubled the speed of weaving.

Then, in 1764, James Hargreaves invented the “spinning Jenny”, which did the work of ten spinners. By 1785 the production of cotton had risen to 16 million pounds p.a., when before the “spinning Jenny” home workers produced 500.000 tons of cotton (1t=2240lb).

Richard Arkwright, later Sir Richard Arkwright, stole the basic design of the “spinning Jenny” from Hargreaves and built up a monopoly on the mechanical production of cotton in Europe.

In 1785 Reverend Edmund Cartwright designed the power-loom. In 1851 there were 250 000 power-looms in England. That number increased by an average of 100 000 per decade and had its peak in 1913, when there were 3 million power looms in operation worldwide.

Where did all the cotton come from?

In the early 19th century Britain oppressed cotton-textile imports from its Indian colony to protect British producers, and imported mainly raw cotton. By 1850 India hardly exported any finished textiles to England anymore. Raw cotton at that time was India’s second biggest export, with 19 percent of all exports, but the quality was inferior to American cotton. Some cotton was grown in Egypt, but American cotton was cheaper than both other kinds.

Although American cotton is the better, long stapled kind, the only type of cotton that could grow in the soil of the southern states (otherwise perfect because of the hot, dry climate) was impossible to harvest profitably: three pounds of cotton fibre contained three pounds of sticky seeds that had to be picked out by hand. In 1797 the “gin” was invented, the last of the inventions necessary for the rise of the

cotton trade. The “gin” was a rotating drum with nails that snagged cotton fibres and left seeds behind making it possible for the southern states to harvest and export cotton on a large scale.<sup>72 73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bryson.

<sup>73</sup> Courtman, Stuart: Robert Blincoe and the Cotton trade.

## **7 Cotton and slavery**

### **7.1 Slavery within the cotton industry**

Even though Whitney's "gin" did the work of 50 slaves, harvesting and processing raw cotton remained labour-intensive: more and more slaves were needed to keep up with the rising demand. The US cotton-export had risen to two billion pounds by 1861 per year. At the time of Whitney's invention, slavery existed in just 6 US states; by 1861 it was legal in 15 states. The northern states couldn't grow cotton but exported slaves to the southern states. Between 1793 and the outbreak of the civil war, over 800 000 slaves were shipped to the south.<sup>74</sup>

I think that slave-labour was an important part of the cotton trade – cotton could never have become so lucrative without slavery and was the reason why slavery actually increased before it finally was abolished.

### **7.2 Bremen, cotton and slavery**

For centuries, Britain (and the Netherlands) had dominated trade over the sea, but in the 19th century, the hanseatic towns pushed in.

In 1827 a contract was made with these towns<sup>75</sup> to promote and safeguard trade with the USA. Hamburg still was doing "second-hand" trade with the US, importing cotton via England. Bremen had a long history of dealings with the US and could import directly, which kept freight costs lower and made cotton, imported through Bremen, cheaper. In 1857 Bremen surpassed Hamburg in cotton imports. It was the city's central position in cotton-trading that led to the founding of the Bremer Baumwollbörse. This links the economic success of Bremen with the cotton trade and through cotton with slavery and later hidden slavery.

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<sup>74</sup> Bryson.

<sup>75</sup> Handels- und Schifffahrtsvertrag von 1827.

I think that the subject of the Bremer Baumwollbörse should not be treated without discussing the way that Bremen (through the Baumwollbörse) benefited from slave-labour, even after the abolition of slavery.

## 8 The Bremer Baumwollbörse

### 8.1 Founding of the Bremer Baumwollbörse

The “Bremer Baumwollbörse” was founded on October 1st 1872 and was at first known as the “committee for cotton trade”. Its aim was to protect the interests of its members, dealers in raw cotton and entrepreneurs involved in the primary processing of cotton as well as the interests of the German cotton economy in general.<sup>76</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, Bremen was already doing extremely well in the cotton trade. The Trade- and Shipping contract between the USA and German Hanseatic cities from 1827 ensured further development of US-import. The easily accessible port in Bremerhaven had been operating since 1830 and steam-ships had just started to arrive from America. Bremen received direct shipments from the USA –Hamburg was importing cotton from the United States through British ports- and had the railroad system to ensure further transportation. Bremen was about to surpass Hamburg cotton imports in 1857 and those of another competitor, Le Havre in 1886.<sup>77</sup>

A problem was the lack of an organisation like the Liverpool cotton exchange, founded in 1841. All disputes about quality and other matters had to be referred to the court of arbitration of the Liverpool cotton exchange. The establishment of the “Baumwoll-Usancen” changed all this. They contained rules that fitted German specifics and that were implemented by people who were aware of German interests. For the trade through Bremen it was extremely important that problems could now be settled on the spot, it saved time. This made trade with Bremen internationally more attractive.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Schottelius, D. a.o.: Bremer Baumwollbörse- Bremen Cotton Exchange, p.1. - there were no page numbers in this book.

<sup>77</sup> Löbe, Karl: Seehaven- 100 entscheidende Jahre.

<sup>78</sup> Schwarmann.

## 8.2 Purpose of the Bremer Baumwollbörse

The Bremer Baumwollbörse handled questions of shipping and freight rates, problems to do with the quality of cotton, of ginning and packing as well as problems arising from different legal systems, currencies, tax systems and import-/ and export conditions existing in the individual countries that were involved in the international dealings of the cotton trade. To show the scope of potential problems in the multinational cotton trade: In 1870 nearly half the cotton arriving in Bremen was imported from the USA, more than eighty percent in 1889 (130 000 tons out of 133 000). But through transit trade Bremen was also involved with Austria, Russia, Poland, Switzerland, Hungary, Scandinavia, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Belgium. The difficulties arising from different legal and economic systems must have been immense.<sup>79 80</sup>

The establishment of the Rules of the Bremer Baumwollbörse (originally: “Baumwoll-Usancen”) and the introduction of the boards of arbitration on Quality and other disputes formed an internationally accepted basis for multinational trade. The Rules are –until today, although they have changed to go with the time– what contracts all over the world are based on in the cotton trade. They are something like an independent law-system that replaces national legal systems and prevents complicated law-suits in case of contract disputes.

A part of the Rules of the Bremer Baumwollbörse is the Arbitration of Quality (Qualitätsarbitrage). Two classes of the Bremer Baumwollbörse act as supervisors who control the handling and storage of the cotton before delivery to make sure that all is done in accordance with the Rules. Their verdict leads to certification by the Bremer Baumwollbörse. More about this topic can be found in chapter 7.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Schottelius, a.o., chapter 'The Scope of Activities'.

<sup>80</sup> Löbe.

<sup>81</sup> Schottelius, a.o., chapter 'Special Facilities of the BBB'.

### **8.3 The development of the Bremer Baumwollbörse until 1918**

The history of the Bremer Baumwollbörse cannot be seen separately from the development of the cotton–trade and the position of Bremen in this development. As cotton trade expanded and Bremen achieved an important position, business at the Baumwollbörse increased.

With the founding of the Baumwollbörse, Germany was able to compete with similar foreign organisations and German economy boosted in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1886 The Union of South German Cotton Manufactures became a member of the Bremer Baumwollbörse, other German spinner associations followed. The Austrian cotton industry joined in 1894 and in 1906 the Swiss Spinning, Twisting and Weaving Mills followed.<sup>82</sup>

Cotton trade and the activity of the Bremer Baumwollbörse brought Bremen into the twentieth century, in my opinion, moving its economy a big step towards the international economic system we have today.

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<sup>82</sup> Schotteluis, chapter 'The Scope of Activities of the BBB'.

## **9 Classers and Arbitration on the quality of cotton**

The sworn experts of the Bremer Baumwollbörse control the handling of the cotton and the storage before delivery. Out of each shipload a sample is taken, packed and sealed for the arbitration. Through arbitration, the buyer, wherever in the world he is, is assured that the quality of the cotton is as high as it was defined in the contract. If then a complaint is made, two classers have to examine the case without knowing who is suing whom - this is called an anonymous arbitration. A complaint can be made within three weeks after delivery. Objection to the classer's decision is possible within seven days, and a different judge, who must be a member of the Baumwollbörse as well, re-examines the case, also anonymously. The second decision is incontestable and final. The institution of arbitration and the work of classers have of course changed with the changes in shipping, packing and storage, but the purpose is the same as it was in 1872: ensuring the quality of cotton and settling disputes between contractors.<sup>83</sup>

Cotton is rated by different aspects: colour, cleanness and the length of the fibres. The ideal colour is similar to the colour of fresh butter and the longer the fibres are, the more precious they become.<sup>84</sup>

### **9.1 Classers today**

Since the manual classification of cotton doesn't offer enough information for modern spinning and weaving techniques, today, the quality testing is done in laboratory. They use special microscopes<sup>85</sup> and a method called "High Volume Instrument Test Line". The Bremer Baumwollbörse today does not do this itself; the laboratories involved belong to groups like the Bremen Faserinstitut.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Schotteluis, chapter 'The Scope of Activities of the BBB'.

<sup>84</sup> Willhelmy, Walter: Portrait.

<sup>85</sup> so genannte Elektronenrastermikroskope.

<sup>86</sup> Friedrich Bramsch, International Cotton Advisory Committee.

## 10 Derivatives exchange

In general, derivatives exchanges or futures markets are organisations contracting the deliveries of a commodity that will take place in the future. The actual transactions will be carried out at a set date in the future. Such institutions are important, because prices can be secured and parties can try to gain speculative profit. The buyer can protect himself against unwanted changes in price. Those futures market organisations standardise procedures because they are bound by international standards. This is how derivatives exchanges make the trade of goods easier.<sup>87</sup>

The speculative nature of such transactions seemed suspicious to German traders after they had already been introduced in other countries. Other cotton-trading organisations like those in Liverpool, New York and Chicago realized long before Germany that futures markets were profitable (Liverpool opened its cotton futures market in 1876). In Germany, in the 1890's futures markets were even forbidden by the state for a short time, because of pressure from agricultural interest organisations and anti-Semites, who believed all speculators were Jews and found speculation incompatible with “German honesty”. Also, there was a specific market tax<sup>88</sup> in Germany, which after long negotiations was finally abolished for cotton in 1913. In the same year, the Bremen Futures Market opened.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Unknown Author, [www.wirtschaftslexikon24.com](http://www.wirtschaftslexikon24.com) [Status: 14.05.14]

<sup>88</sup> so genannte Börsensteuer.

<sup>89</sup> De Porre, Eugen: Article about Eduard Hirschfeld.

## 11 Cotton trade and slave labour

Even before the civil war was over, President Abraham Lincoln became convinced, that- after the expected defeat- the southern states needed to be rebuilt, reconstructed as economies functioning without slavery. In this reconstruction slaves were to be freed gradually. This is called the Reconstruction period.<sup>90</sup>

As one would expect after more than 300 years of slave-economy, the emancipation of slaves took a long time. What is surprising is that slavery did not go away slowly but instead increased before it was abolished in the entire United States. And this was, like I mentioned before, because of cotton.<sup>91</sup>

In the early 19th century, Jefferson had written: “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal*”. And he had said: “*Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people are to be free*”.

George Mason, an important politician from Virginia, had called slave-trade an “*infernal traffic*”. Many other political leaders from the southern states agreed.<sup>92</sup>

But during the first half of the nineteenth century cotton became the most traded commodity in the world, at the outbreak of the Civil War; the southern states were exporting two billion pounds per year. And, as we have seen, cotton picking is very labour-intensive. To keep cotton export profitable, slave-labour was considered necessary. Slavery was legal in only six states at the beginning of the century, when the Civil War began it was legal in fifteen states. The northern states couldn't grow cotton because of their climate, but they profited by exporting slaves to the southern states.<sup>93</sup>

By 1860, four million slaves were forced to work in the United States, of whom 60 percent worked in the cotton industry.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Mc Neese, Tim: Reconstruction: Life after the Civil War.

<sup>91</sup> Bryson.

<sup>92</sup> Tomkins, Cydnor Bailey: Slavery: What it, was, what it has done, what is intends to do.

<sup>93</sup> Bryson.

<sup>94</sup> Understanding Slavery Initiative, [http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=309&Itemid=221](http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=309&Itemid=221)

On April 24th, 1860 in a speech in the House of Representatives, Cydnor B. Tomkins attacked the way his contemporaries had let economy change their attitude towards slavery by caricaturing their attitude:

*“[They feel that...] while slaves were few and cotton scarce, slavery might be a wrong, but with four million slaves and four million two hundred thousand bales of cotton, it becomes just, humane, moral [...] If slave work is profitable, slaveholding is equitable[=fair]. Thus it is decided, that whatever is profitable is also equitable: Justice and injustice are mere matters of profit and loss...”*<sup>95</sup>

In January 1863 President Lincoln published the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves in the Northern states, but also admitting it could not be enforced immediately. In 1865 in the 13th amendment to the American constitution slavery was declared illegal and the 14th amendment in 1868 made slaves full citizens. In 1870 the 15th amendment gave the right to vote to all black men.<sup>96</sup>

I would like to add that women in general were not allowed to vote till 1920. But the cotton trade was booming, and on cotton plantations, former slaves were needed more than ever, as cotton exportation increased.

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<sup>95</sup> Tomkins.

<sup>96</sup> Meadows, James: Slavery: The Struggle for Freedom.

## 11.1 Life on cotton plantations

*"There were no beds given the slaves, unless one coarse blanket be considered such, and none but the men and women had these. This, however, is not considered a very great privation. They find less difficulty from the want of beds, than from the want of time to sleep; for when their day's work in the field is done, the most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day; and when this is done, old and young, male and female, married and single, drop down side by side, on one common bed,--the cold, damp floor,--each covering himself or herself with their miserable blankets; and here they sleep till they are summoned to the field by the driver's horn."*<sup>97</sup>

Frederick Douglass was a former slave and abolitionist, born in 1817 or 1818. His exact date of birth is unknown, because the birthdays of slaves were not noted down. Before he escaped in 1883, he worked on a cotton plantation where he lived under the circumstances described above.<sup>98</sup>

Plantation-life for slaves meant living and working under extreme conditions. Slaves were treated like objects; the plantation owner was entitled to sell them whenever he saw fit, moving them to another plantation and so tearing apart all social ties. He didn't even have to inform the human beings involved, and it seems questionable whether slaves were regarded as human beings at all. As described in the quotation, enslaved people often didn't get enough sleep, especially considering the hard work they had to do.<sup>99</sup> In most cases brutal punishments were used to make slaves work harder, but sometimes they were also offered a small piece of land and allowed to keep animals on for their own use.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Douglass, Frederick: *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p. 23

<sup>98</sup> Low, Craig: [http://www.leeandlow.com/p/frederick\\_tg.mhtml](http://www.leeandlow.com/p/frederick_tg.mhtml) [Status: 17.05.14]

<sup>99</sup> Drenovsky, Rachael: *American Abolitionists* - [Status: 17.05.14]

<sup>100</sup> Understanding Slavery Initiative, [www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com) - [Status 18.05.14]

It is impressive how many slaves managed under these conditions to not only not to give up their culture, but to develop a new identity of their own. They established strong communities and upheld African religious traditions, mixed up with Christian elements. Their religious life contained practices like voodoo; singing was an important part of their culture, religious and otherwise. Because it gave strength to the slaves, the slave owners often feared and therefore forbade religious practises.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Understanding Slavery Initiative, [www. understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)

## 12 Hidden slavery and slavery today

### 12.1 Hidden slavery

The last period of reconstruction, from 1867 to '77 is known as the “Radical Reconstruction”. According to Eric Foner, the leading authority on the period, it was

*“[...] an era of corruption presided over by unscrupulous “carpetbaggers” from the North, unprincipled southern white “scalawags<sup>102</sup>” and ignorant freedman.”<sup>103</sup>*

In his (very difficult to read) book on Reconstruction , Foner’s view of the Reconstruction period and the transition from slaves to free people becomes clear in this quotation: *“That transformation was in part a grim change. Despite the striving of ex-slaves for the economic self-sufficiency that earlier generations of Americans had considered essential to independence, national emancipation policy re-conceptualised autonomy as a right to compete in labour markets for the reward of social mobility. Leaving freed people acutely vulnerable, the shift converged with a hardening of class stratification in a consolidating industrial capitalism that resisted protective labour regulation as antithetical to laissez-faire principles but drew readily on the coercive power of the state to suppress workers protests “.*

His interpretation seems to be that slaves were freed from one system of oppression- slavery- into another: capitalism. According to Foner, there was no sympathy for the struggles of black people becoming independent even though one could expect that from the history of early American settlers who had been through a similar process. The competition for workplaces was encouraged and

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<sup>102</sup> Oxford Dictionary: carpetbaggers, “originally applied to people from the north of the US who went to the South after the Civil War to profit from Reconstruction; scalawag, scallywag: “a white Southerner who collaborated with northern Republicans during the post-Civil War reconstruction period”; freedman, “an emancipated slave”.

<sup>103</sup> Foner, Eric: Reconstruction- New Perspectives in the Postbellum United States, e-book, 12 %.

solidarity, protest and attempts to protect worker's rights suppressed. Actually, the government encouraged the exploitation of workers.<sup>104</sup>

Mostly, freed slaves were not given any land and had to work for very low wages. For those who got a small piece of land, the system of sharecropping kept them from achieving anything with it. Share croppers worked a part of the plantation for a (small) share of the crop. They were forced to borrow machinery from the land-owner for exaggerated rates. Sharecroppers had to buy seeds at a very high price from the plantation owner. They had to buy their food and clothes at exaggerated prices in the “country store”, also owned by the land-owner. The sharecropper harvested his part of the plantation, then had to sell it to the merchant he was already indebted to, often for more than his share of the harvest was considered to be worth. After harvest, his debt was often as high as or higher than before. In this way, freed slaves became so totally dependant on the big land-owners who could be said to “own” them almost as much as they had before been owned as slaves.

Discrimination against former slaves also included the Black Codes, laws that were made in order to control freed slaves. They included Vagrancy laws, under which black people could be forced to work for white people if they were seen as being unemployed. They were arrested and if they could not pay the fine, they were forced to work it off.<sup>105</sup>

Frederick Douglas was an escaped slave, who became leader of the abolitionist’s movement. The film “12 Years a Slave” is based on his life. In a speech titled “Liberty and Equality for All”, that he made in Congress in December 1866, he said about the situation in the eighteen sixties:

*“Slavery, like all other great systems of wrong, founded in the depths of human selfishness, and existing for ages, has not neglected its own conservation. [...] and today it is so strong that it could exist, not only without laws, but even against laws.”*

What he had to say in the 19th century could, in my view, be applied to the situation in many countries today. In the 19th century, the demands of the world

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<sup>104</sup> Foner, e-book: 12 %.

<sup>105</sup> Neese

wide cotton trade were responsible first for the increase of black slavery and later for the exploitation of freed slaves. It seems to me that the cotton trade behind the Bremer Baumwollbörse is in great part responsible for both the increase of slavery and the brutal exploitation of freed slaves.

## **12.2 Modern slavery in cotton manufactures**

In Uzbekistan, which is the second largest producer of cotton in the world, 450.000 children have to work at cotton harvest for two month of the year.<sup>106</sup> The Uzbek government forces those children some as young as 7 years, to cut school and participate in the hard work of harvesting cotton. They do not get paid, but official propaganda pictures their work as a „patriotic deed“ and if someone refuses, they are punished. This basically is slave work, because the state decides about the life of those children and neither children nor parents can influence the decision.<sup>107</sup> According to an estimate by an Australian NGO (Non Governmental Organisation) called „Walk Free Foundation“ these children are among the 30 million slaves all over the world. In India for example there are about 14 million slaves, although slavery officially is forbidden.<sup>108</sup> Today, more human beings are held in slavery than ever before in history, even though slavery is illegal in all countries.<sup>109</sup>

I think outsourcing to third world countries encourages modern slavery, because western companies subcontract companies in the third world, which then use slave-labour. This way, big companies like H&M can keep their image intact and don't have to take responsibility while enjoying the benefits of slave labour. They claim to be unable to change working conditions because of the many different subcontracted companies involved in the process of outsourcing.

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<sup>106</sup> Pientka, Claudia: <http://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/hm-produkte-baumwolle-gepflueckt-von-kinderhand-603979.html> 20.05.14

<sup>107</sup> Author unknown: <http://www.3sat.de/scobel/156568/index.html>. 19.05.14

<sup>108</sup> Fromm, Anne: Moderne Sklaverei: Ausgebeutet für Profit, Sex und Nervenkitzel

<sup>109</sup> Author unknown: <http://www.3sat.de/scobel/156669/index.html>. 19.05.2014

### 13 How the Bremer Baumwollbörse does or doesn't deal with its history



Cotton pickers on a plantation

Cotton trade and the exploitation of black slaves can't be separated. When I discovered that the success and importance of the cotton trade in general and of the Bremer Baumwollbörse in particular is based on slave work, I wanted to know what the attitude of the Baumwollbörse itself is to this problematic aspect of its own history. I have found two publications by the Baumwollbörse, both very informative, one from 1958, the other one published more recently in 1997. The first one completely ignores the subject of slave labour. The second one contains only one picture and two sentences that go with the photograph.

*“Baumwollpflücker am Mississippi. Sklaven und Blues sind untrennbar mit der Geschichte des Baumwollanbaus in den amerikanischen Südstaaten verknüpft.”*<sup>110</sup>

The picture shows, in the foreground, a black family, father, mother and a small child of about four years old on what seems to be a cotton plantation. They are smiling into the camera and seem healthy and happy. You can not be sure whether the child is working, it merely stands in the middle of the field and has cotton in its small hands. In the background there are more cotton pickers and the adults look as if the photographer has just interrupted their work. Most of them are

<sup>110</sup> Picture and text, Schwarmann, p. 54

looking into the camera. Their clothes are clean and they are all wearing hats against the bright sun, shining on an idyllic landscape.

There is no date given for when the picture was taken, but it certainly doesn't show any reality I have read about. In the slave-trade era, families were separated, slaves were worked to death, or killed by cruel punishment and torture, children were forced to work, women were sexually abused. And even after abolition, conditions hadn't changed for most of the slaves and didn't for quite a few years.

The picture as the only visual representation of black labour on cotton-plantations is a conscious falsification of historical reality. I have found photographs showing this reality. Why weren't these pictures chosen for the booklet?

In addition to the inappropriate picture there is the text. First of all, they keep it simple. There are no words which could make the text sound negative, it is fairly objective. "Sklaven und Blues sind untrennbar mit der Geschichte des Baumwollanbaus in den amerikanischen Südstaaten verknüpft". But can an organisation which profited immensely from something that is now illegal remain neutral towards its participation in what is now considered a crime against humanity?

The linking of cotton-picking, slavery and the blues, again, is in a way correct: Slaves indeed brought the blues to the US, and of course this is connected with the cotton cultivation. But since nobody sees a music genre as something morally wrong, connecting it with a crime against humanity seems like an attempt to pass off the connection as representing something not altogether bad. This book might be a few years old by now, but on the official web site of the Bremen cotton exchange it is still recommended.

In my opinion by dealing with slavery this way the Bremer Baumwollbörse is trying to deny part of its past and its responsibility today.

I was unable to find any statement or publication (beyond the two mentioned above) in the world-wide-web. Nothing was published on slavery by the Bremer Baumwollbörse, which otherwise has a newsletter and many other digital publications. Even on the official website of the Bremen cotton exchange, nothing on slave-labour.

Instead, I found a website that deals with suicide among slaves and I think a quotation from a former slave might be a good contrast to the image drawn up by the Bremer Baumwollbörse:

*„They say Negroes won't commit suicide, but Isom [Hutchinson's father] told us of a girl that committed suicide. There was a girl named Lu who used to run off and go to the dances. The patrollers<sup>3</sup> would try to catch her but they couldn't because she was too fast on her feet. One day they got after her in the daytime. She had always outran them at night. She ran to the cabin and got her quarter which she had hid. She put the quarter in her mouth. The white folks didn't allow the slaves to handle no money. The quarter got stuck in her throat, and she went on down to the slough and drowned herself rather than let them beat her, and mark her up. Them patrollers sure would get you and beat you up. If they couldn't catch you when you were running away from them, they would come on your master's place and get you and beat you. The master would allow them to do it. They didn't let the patrollers come on the Blackshear place, but this gal was so hard-headed 'bout goin' out that they made a 'ception to her. And they intended to make her an example to the rest of the slaves. But they didn't get Lucy“<sup>111</sup>*

IDA BLACKSHEAR HUTCHINSON, enslaved in Alabama, WPA interview, 1938

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<sup>111</sup> Hutchinson, Ida Blackshear: WPA Interview - <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/emancipation/text2/suicide.pdf> 22.05.14

## Conclusion

After dealing with the Bremen cotton trade, slavery, the cotton trade in general and its consequences on slavery, we figured that you can not part these topics. Slavery is a part of the cotton industry and therefore also a part of the Bremer Baumwollbörse. The Bremer Baumwollbörse based their success on slave made cotton, but still is trying to deny the responsibility by not handling, therefore discussing it in an adequate way.

Bremen imported most of its cotton from the US, but though transit trade it had to deal with many other countries. To solve problems like different currencies, law and tax systems and so on the Bremen people needed generally accepted rules to work with. The Bremer Baumwoll-Usancen. After establishing those rules, transit trade via Bremen, courts of arbitration and the arbitration on quality in general went down faster and therefore made the Bremer Baumwollbörse a more desirable partner in trade.

After finishing the research, we had to admit that there is not one striking reason why Bremen was so successful. Many different criteria led to Bremen's outstanding position in the cotton industry. Good timing, right choices, as well as great effort coming from the merchants were needed and the city was lucky regarding all of these factors. Furthermore, it was very shocking for us, as Bremen people, to find out that Bremen was one of the few cities, that were openly supporting Slavery.

Since the last part of a long text is remembered best, we think, one should mention the cruelties, slaves had to suffer from. Punishments, a family life which could be controlled and torn apart by others as well as being controlled and owned by someone are only some examples.

And it is not all in the past, although it is officially forbidden by law, slavery still exists in our modern world. Children and grown ups, mostly in the eastern world, still live under similar circumstances. The struggle for freedom is not over yet.

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