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Cotton Kingdom in the South

As You Read

Explore These Questions

- Why did cotton planters begin to move westward?
- How did the cotton gin affect slavery in the South?
- Why did the South have less industry than the North?

Identify

- Eli Whitney
- Cotton Kingdom
- William Gregg

SETTING the Scene

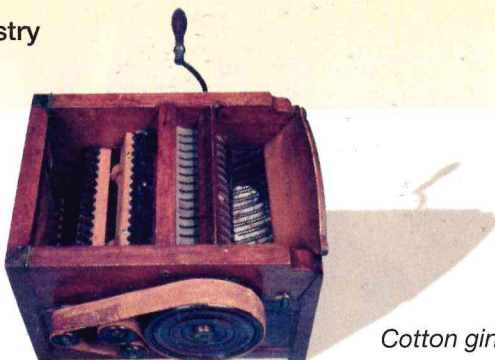
In 1827, an Englishman, Basil Hall, traveled through much of the South aboard a riverboat. He complained that the southerners he met were interested in only one thing—cotton:

“All day and almost all night long, the captain, pilot, crew and passengers were talking of nothing else; and sometimes our ears were so wearied with the sound of cotton! cotton! cotton! that we gladly hailed fresh . . . company in hopes of some change—but alas! . . . ‘What’s cotton at?’ was the first eager inquiry.”

Cotton became even more important to the South in the years after Hall’s visit. Even though southerners grew other crops, cotton was the region’s leading export. Cotton plantations—and the slave system on which they depended—shaped the way of life in the South.

Cotton Gin, Cotton Boom

The Industrial Revolution greatly increased the demand for southern cotton. Textile mills in the North and in Britain needed more and more cotton to make cloth. At first, southern planters could not meet the demand. They could grow plenty of cotton because the South’s soil and climate were ideal. However, removing the seeds from the cotton by hand was a slow process. Planters needed a better way to clean cotton.



Cotton gin

Eli Whitney’s invention

In 1793, **Eli Whitney**, a young Connecticut schoolteacher, was traveling to Georgia. He was going to be a tutor on a plantation. When Whitney learned of the planters’ problem, he decided to build a machine to clean cotton.

In only 10 days, Whitney came up with a model. His cotton engine, or gin, had two rollers with thin wire teeth. When cotton was swept between the rollers, the teeth separated the seeds from the fibers. (See Linking History and Technology on page 384.)

The cotton gin was simple, but its effects were enormous. A worker using a gin could do the work of 50 people cleaning cotton by hand. Because of the gin, planters could now grow cotton at a huge profit.

Connections With Science

Technology thieves stole Eli Whitney’s first cotton gin. Before Whitney could build another, someone filed a patent for a machine that copied his invention. To receive the profits that were due to him, Whitney went to court. He filed more than 50 lawsuits.

Linking History and Technology



① Cotton bolls, made up of fiber and seeds, are fed into the cotton gin. The red arrows show the path of the cotton through the gin.

② As the handle is turned, the cylinder and brushes rotate.

③ Wire teeth catch the cotton bolls and pull them through narrow wire slots.

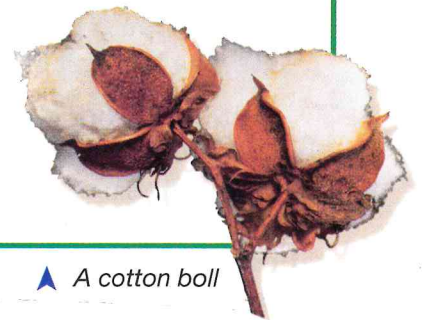
④ The seeds are too large to pass through the slots. They fall to the bottom of the gin.

⑤ Rotating brushes pull cleaned cotton fiber from the wire teeth and sweep it out of the gin.

The Cotton Gin

The cotton gin separated unwanted seeds from cotton fiber. With the help of a gin, a worker was able to process as much as 50 pounds of cotton in a single day. As a result, cotton production became a very profitable business.

★ How did the gin separate the seeds from the fiber?



▲ A cotton boll

Cotton Kingdom and slavery

The cotton gin led to a boom in cotton production. In 1792, planters grew only 6,000 bales of cotton a year. By 1850, the figure was over 2 million bales.

Planters soon learned that soil wore out if planted with cotton year after year. They needed new land to cultivate. After the War of 1812, cotton planters began to move west.

By the 1850s, there were cotton plantations extending in a wide band from South

Carolina through Alabama and Mississippi to Texas. (See the map on page 386.) This area of the South became known as the **Cotton Kingdom**.

Tragically, as the Cotton Kingdom spread, so did slavery. Even though cotton could now be cleaned by machine, it still had to be planted and picked by hand. The result was a cruel cycle. The work of slaves brought profits to planters. Planters used the profits to buy more land and more slaves.

An Agricultural Economy

Cotton was the South's most profitable cash crop. However, the best conditions for growing cotton could be found mostly in the southernmost portion of the South. In other areas of the South, rice, sugar cane, and tobacco were major crops. In addition, Southerners raised much of the nation's livestock.

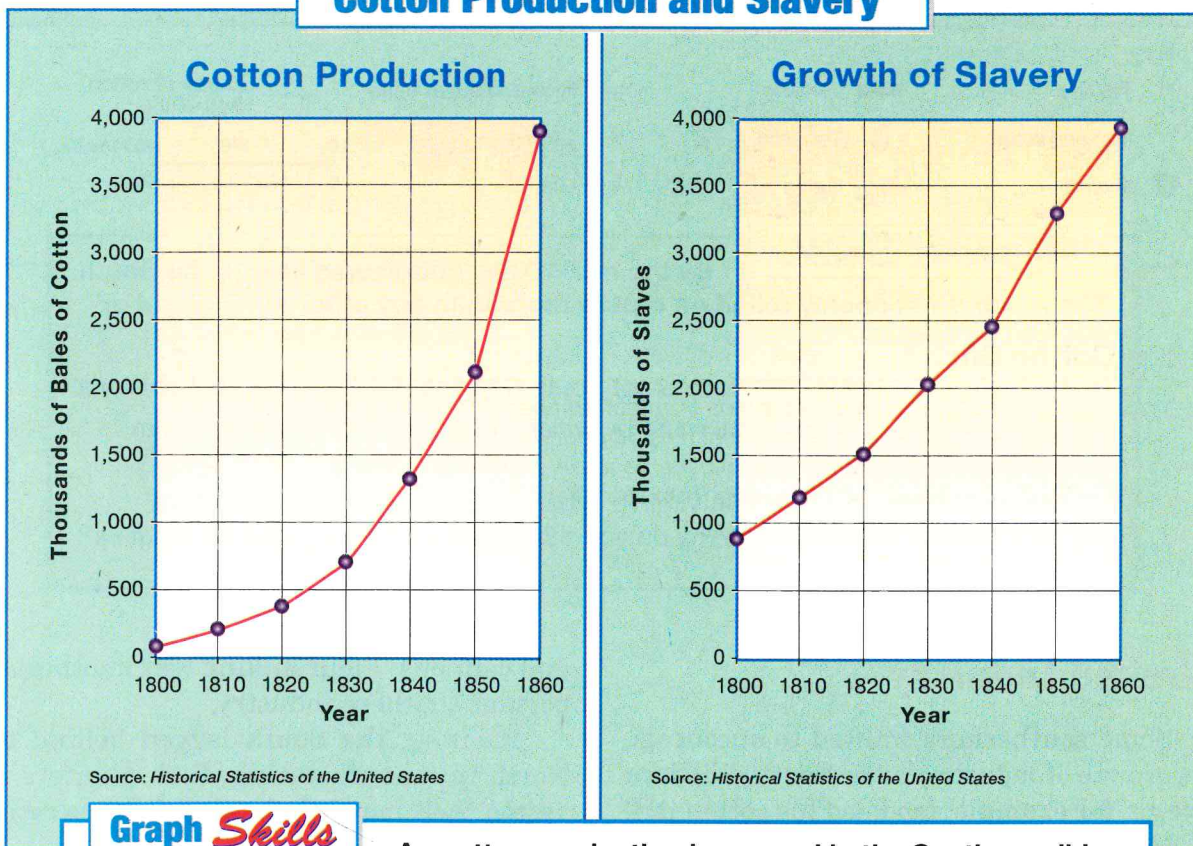
Rice was an important crop along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Sugar cane was important in Louisiana and Texas. Growing rice and sugar cane required expensive irrigation and drainage systems. Cane growers also needed costly machinery to grind their harvest. Small-scale farmers could not afford such expensive equipment, however. As a result, the plantation system

dominated areas of sugar and rice production just as it did areas of cotton production.

Tobacco had been an export of the South since 1619, and it continued to be planted in Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky. However, in the early 1800s, the large tobacco plantations of colonial days had given way to small tobacco farms. On these farms, a few field hands tended five or six acres of tobacco.

In addition to the major cash crops of cotton, rice, sugar, and tobacco, the South also led the nation in livestock production. Southern livestock owners profited from hogs, oxen, horses, mules, and beef cattle. Much of this livestock was raised in areas that were unsuitable for growing crops, such as the pine woods of North Carolina.

Cotton Production and Slavery



Graph Skills

As cotton production increased in the South, so did the number of enslaved African Americans.

- 1. Comprehension** (a) How many more bales of cotton were produced in 1850 than in 1820? (b) In what decade did the number of slaves increase the most?
- 2. Critical Thinking** Predict how the end of slavery would affect the southern economy.

Economics

Products of the South



Key

Textiles

Lumber

Rice and sugar cane

← Spread of cotton
1840–1860

Iron and steel

Tobacco

Cotton

0 150 300 Miles

Mining

Cattle

Grain

0 150 300 Kilometers

Geography Skills

By the mid-1800s, cotton was king in the South.

The southern economy relied on cotton more than any other agricultural or industrial product.

- 1. Location** On the map, locate: (a) South Carolina, (b) Alabama, (c) Louisiana.
- 2. Movement** Describe the route by which cotton production moved from South Carolina to Texas.
- 3. Critical Thinking** (a) In Virginia, what agricultural product was more important than cotton? (b) Why do you think little cotton was grown in Virginia?

Limited Industry

Some southerners wanted to encourage the growth of industry in the South. **William Gregg**, for example, modeled his cotton mill in South Carolina on the mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. Gregg built houses and gardens for his workers and schools for their children.

The South also developed a few other successful industries. In Richmond, Virginia, for example, the Tredegar Iron Works turned out railroad equipment, machinery, tools,

and cannons. Flour milling was another important southern industry.

Even so, the South lagged behind the North in manufacturing. Rich planters invested their money in land and slaves rather than in factories.

Also, slavery reduced the need for southern industry. In the North, most people had enough money to buy factory goods. In the South, however, millions of slaves could not buy anything. As a result, the demand for goods in the South was not as great as in the North. This hurt southern industry.

Economically Dependent

Many southerners ordered goods from northern and European manufacturers. This advertisement appeared in the mail-order catalog of a store located in Milledgeville, Illinois. ★ Why were there so few factories in the South?



Economically Dependent

With little industry of its own, the South came to depend more and more on the North and on Europe. Southern planters often borrowed money from northern banks in order to expand their plantations. They also purchased much of their furniture, farm tools, and machines from northern or European factories.

Many southerners resented this situation. One southerner described a burial to show how the South depended on the North for many goods in the 1850s:

“The grave was dug through solid marble, but the marble headstone came from Vermont. It was in a pine wilderness but the pine coffin came from Cincinnati. An iron mountain overshadowed it but the coffin nails and the screws and the shovel came

from Pittsburgh. . . . A hickory grove grew nearby, but the pick and shovel handles came from New York. . . . That country, so rich in underdeveloped resources, furnished nothing for the funeral except the corpse and the hole in the ground.”

Still, most southerners were proud of the booming cotton industry in their region. As long as cotton remained king, southerners believed, they could look to the future with confidence.

★ Section 3 Review ★

Recall

- Locate** (a) South Carolina, (b) Alabama, (c) Mississippi, (d) Texas.
- Identify** (a) Eli Whitney, (b) Cotton Kingdom, (c) William Gregg.

Comprehension

- Why did the Cotton Kingdom spread westward?
- How did the cotton gin cause slavery to expand in the South?

- Why did the South not develop as much industry as the North?

Critical Thinking and Writing

- Predicting Consequences** How might the southern economy have developed differently if the cotton gin had never been invented?
- Analyzing Primary Sources** Review the quotation that appears at the end of the section. Is the southerner praising or criticizing the economy of the South? Explain.



Activity Linking Past and Present The cotton gin had a major impact on the South's way of life. In a chart, list some modern inventions, describe what they do, and explain how they are changing the way you live today.