

2 The Changing South and West

★ Section Focus

★ **Key Terms** cotton gin ■ squatter ■ Second Great Awakening

★ **Main Idea** The invention of the cotton gin made slavery in the South profitable and also encouraged its expansion westward.

Objectives As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. In what way did cotton culture stimulate westward expansion?
2. What was daily life like in the “Cotton Kingdom”?

It was 1792. At age 27 Eli Whitney had just graduated from college and was heading south to take a job as tutor on a plantation in South Carolina. But he never arrived at the new job. Fate intervened to change his life and the course of American history.

ELI WHITNEY'S COTTON GIN

On the voyage south Whitney met Catherine Greene, widow of General Nathanael Greene of Revolutionary War fame. Mrs. Greene was now struggling to get her Georgia plantation back on its feet.

Mrs. Greene's problems were not unique. Few places in the South were prosperous. Uncertain markets and soil exhaustion had greatly lowered profits from tobacco, indigo, and rice cultivation. Planters on the Sea Islands off the Georgia coast, however, had discovered a profitable new crop. This was sea-island cotton, which had a long staple (fiber). The new spinning and weaving machines of the English cotton mills had created a huge demand for the fiber. Unfortunately, the crop grew best near the coast. The only cotton that would grow inland was a short-staple cotton. The fibers of short-staple cotton stuck so firmly to the seed that a worker could clean only one pound of cotton a day.

Whitney postponed going to his new job to visit Mrs. Greene's plantation. There he heard neighborhood planters complain about the problems of short-staple cotton. Whitney had always loved making things. Within ten days he had developed plans for a cotton-cleaning machine. His **cotton gin** was a wooden box filled with stiff wire teeth. When the teeth brushed against the cotton, they picked up the cotton fiber and left the seeds be-

hind. By April 1793 Whitney's engine, or *gin*, was in operation, capable of cleaning 50 pounds of cotton a day.

The cotton gin changed life in the South in three ways. (1) It made the uplands more valuable than the coastlands and thus triggered a vast migration westward. (2) Because cotton was such a valuable crop, the South soon evolved into a one-crop economy. Cotton became King. (3) Cotton culture needed a large work force. Instead of dying out, slavery became more entrenched than ever.

GATEWAYS TO THE WEST

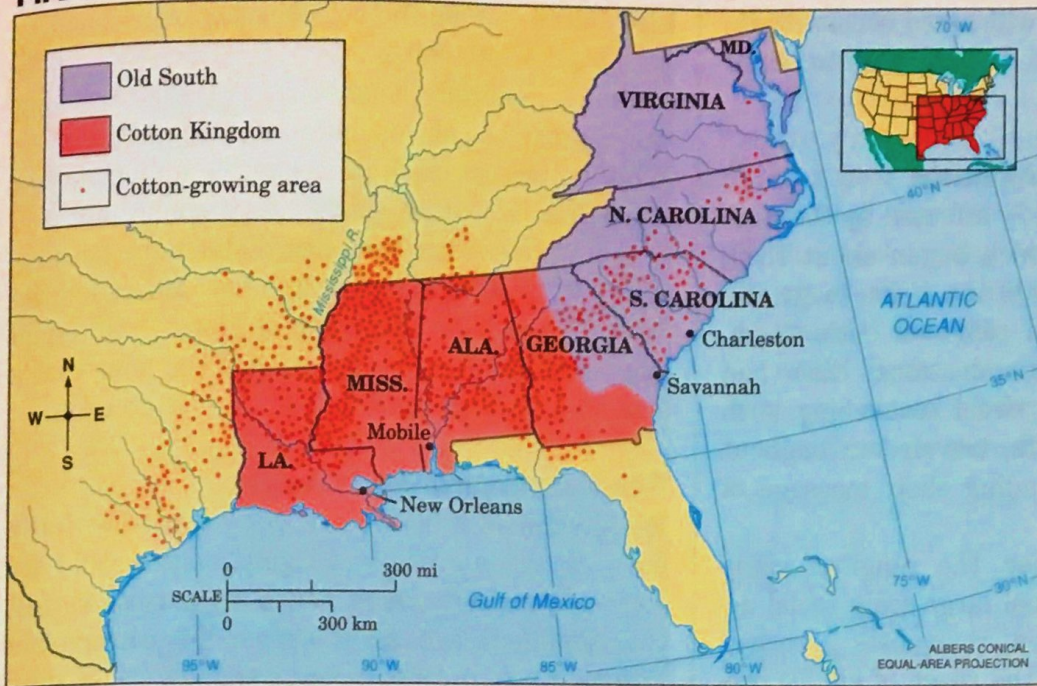
After the War of 1812 a mass migration westward brought four new states into the Union in just four years. Two states—Indiana (1816) and Illinois (1818)—came from the Northwest Territory. The new states of Mississippi (1817) and Alabama (1819) had been part of the Mississippi Territory.

“Old America seems to be breaking up and moving westward.”

—Traveler on the National Road, 1817

The rush west had several causes. American victories during the War of 1812 had destroyed most Indian resistance east of the Mississippi. Eager to cash in on cotton, southerners were searching out new lands to till. Transportation to the West had also improved. Finally, there was a spirit of confidence and restlessness in the air. People were on the move just to be on the move. “Old America seems to be breaking up and moving westward,” a traveler on the National Road wrote in 18

THE COTTON KINGDOM



MAP SKILLS

This map shows the location of cotton-growing areas in the South. In what direction from the Old South did cotton growing spread? Which states made up the Cotton Kingdom? **CRITICAL THINKING** What effects do you think the Mississippi River had on the cotton business?

are seldom out of sight, as we travel on this grand track, towards the Ohio, of family groups before and behind us.”

The National Road was just one of the routes heading west. Other roads included the Great Valley Road into Tennessee, the Federal Road running through the uplands of Georgia and Alabama, and the Natchez Trace, which connected Nashville and Natchez. Land routes were popular with migrants, but they had little commercial significance. The commerce and the new cities of the West depended on water routes.

Three water gateways linked the West with the rest of the nation. In the North was the Erie Canal, which linked the Hudson River with Lake Erie. In the nation’s middle was the Ohio River, a water highway 1,000 miles long. In the South was the port of New Orleans. The coming of steamboats turned New Orleans into a major commercial center, second only to New York City.

Families on the move usually used flatboats—large, raftlike barges—for transportation. One observer wrote in 1828:

We have seen [flatboats] fitted up for the descent of families to the lower country, with a stove, comfortable apartments, beds, and arrangements for commodious habitancy. We see in them ladies, servants,

cattle, horses, sheep, dogs, and poultry; all floating on the same bottom, and on the roof the looms, ploughs, spinning wheels and domestic equipment of the family.

THE COTTON KINGDOM

When they traveled west, most people tended to settle down in roughly the same latitudes they had lived in previously. This was especially true of southerners. Thus, they headed toward those areas where cotton would grow—areas with 200 frost-free days a year.

One planter after another on the Eastern Seaboard sold off house and land and moved west with slaves and family. The West also drew the poor, the ones who hoped to make their fortune with new land and hard work. Often they were **squatters**, people who held no legal rights to the land. When planters with large numbers of slaves arrived, the poor would pick up and move on, for they could not compete with slave labor. Many headed north or further west just to avoid a slaveholding society.

The Cotton Kingdom moved steadily from the Atlantic coastal states—the so-called “Old South”—into the uplands of Alabama, Mississippi, and northern Florida. Then it jumped the Mississippi River into Louisiana and the Mexican

province of Texas. Mexico, which had become independent in 1821, had invited Americans to settle in Texas.

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

Southern society was greatly affected by the Second Great Awakening, which began about 1800. Like the Great Awakening of the 1740s (page 66), it featured an upsurge in religious enthusiasm. Preachers from the denominations that had sprung up during the first Great Awakening, such as Baptists and Methodists, traveled throughout the West and South spreading their message of faith and redemption.

On the southern frontier, the religious camp meetings were the principal large-scale social activity. At those gatherings, revivalists preached that salvation was within the reach of all. To prepare for the Second Coming of Christ, they urged people to root out evil and create a heaven on earth.

The Second Great Awakening also brought Christianity on a large scale to black slaves. There was a strong democratic impulse in evangelism, a belief that all people—black or white—worshipped the same God. Thus, the camp meetings and the

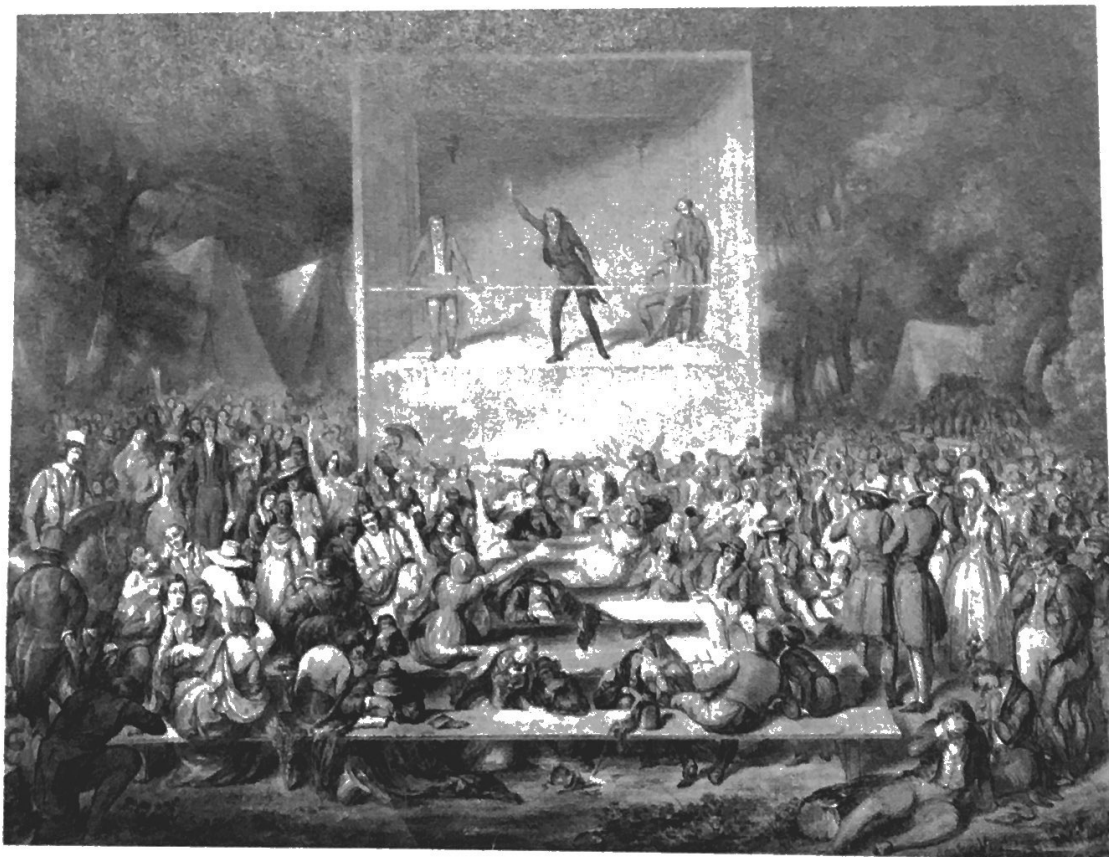
new Baptist or Methodist churches were open to both blacks and whites.

Whites generally hoped that Christian teaching would make the slaves more accepting of their lot. White ministers often preached the importance of obedience. However, slaves heard something else in the Bible stories: they heard about the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and how Moses led the Jews to freedom. The story of Moses, told again and again by black preachers, laid the hope that a new Moses would come to lead them to freedom.

THE RESURGENCE OF SLAVERY

Despite hopes of freedom, slavery spread with the boom in cotton-growing. Virginia, which could not grow cotton and which had a surplus of slaves, thus supplied slaves for the expanding cotton plantations. Slave traders moved gangs of slaves from the Upper South to the Lower South. In these gangs, the men were chained together in pairs. The women and children walked carrying their bundles. The slave traders rode on horseback, whips at the ready, as if they were herding cattle.

By 1860 nearly 4 million black southerners were laboring as slaves. Accounts of their treatment vary. Evidence shows that some were treated as



In the early and middle 1800s many American Baptists, Methodists, and other Protestants participated in the Second Great Awakening. Traveling preachers turned frontier camp meetings into emotionally charged religious experiences, as shown in this watercolor from 1839. According to historian William G. McLoughlin, “women in particular were drawn to camp meetings. With the coming of religious institutions to a community, women found a place outside the home where they could gather, express their fears and hopes, and join in song and prayer with other women.” **RELIGION** What impression does the painting give of the revival meeting?

COTTON EXPORTS, 1820–1860

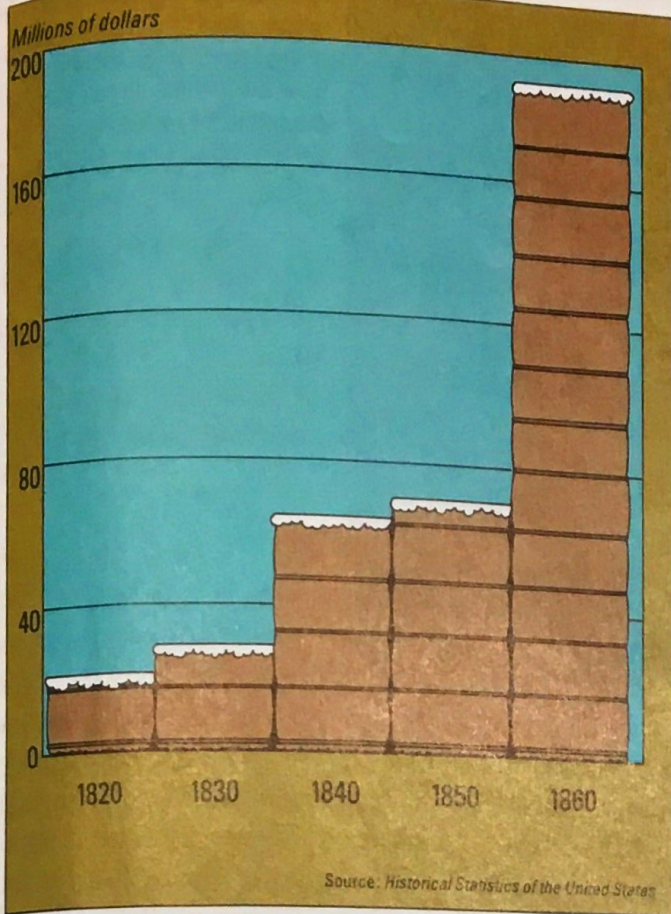


CHART SKILLS

Cotton became the top agricultural cash crop in the country and the most important crop in the South by 1850. Southern planters depended on slave labor to make cotton production profitable.

CRITICAL THINKING What trend does the chart indicate in cotton exports between 1820 and 1860?

valued servants; others as work animals. Even if all slaves had been treated well, however, they were still slaves. They had no rights and no freedom of choice because their lives were the property of others. The planter class justified itself by noting that ancient Rome had slaves. Critics pointed out, however, that Roman slaves could work to buy their own freedom.

Although slavery put whites in a position of authority, it exacted a price from them too. Frances Kemble, an English actress who had married a cotton planter of Georgia, despaired over her place in the system. She wrote in 1838:

After I had been in the house a little while, I was summoned out again to receive the petition of certain poor women in

the family way [pregnant] to have their work lightened. I was, of course, obliged to tell them that I could not interfere in the matter; that their master was away, and that, when he came back, they must present their request to him: they said they had already begged “massa,” and he had refused, and they thought, perhaps, if “missis” begged “massa” for them, he would lighten their task. Poor “missis,” poor “massa,” poor woman, that I am to have such prayers addressed to me!

Slaves found comfort in their own culture and in religion. By the early 1800s a distinct African-American culture was emerging. Music is an example. Visitors to plantations commented on how much the slaves sang as they worked—partly because masters or overseers feared silent slaves. Most slave songs were adaptations of Christian hymns learned in camp meetings. The rhythms, however, were rooted in African traditions; the emotions reflected the slave experience. Frederick Douglass recalled from his slave childhood:

[The songs] told a tale of grief and sorrow. In the most boisterous outbursts of rapturous sentiment, there was ever a tinge of deep melancholy. . . . Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains.



This photograph from 1862 is the earliest to show slaves on a plantation. These families worked in the cotton fields on Edisto Island, South Carolina. **CULTURE** Describe the influence of the Christian church on black slaves.



An engraving from 1861 shows white buyers at a slave auction in Virginia. **ETHICS** Judging from the picture, do you think the artist supported or opposed slavery? How can you tell?

RESISTANCE AND REPRESSION

Thousands of individual slaves sought freedom by running away. The advertisements for these runaway slaves are poignant reminders of one of the basic cruelties of the slave system—the disregard for family ties.

Richmond (Va.) Enquirer, February 20, 1838. Stop the Runaway!!!—\$25 Reward. Ran away from the Eagle Tavern, a Negro fellow named Nat. He is no doubt attempting to follow his wife, who was lately sold to a speculator named Redmond.

On occasion there were outright slave rebellions. The most famous of these was led by Nat Turner in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831.

Nat Turner seems to have been a bright but brooding person. Learning to read with great ease, he read and reread the Bible. A Baptist, he often preached to his fellow slaves. One passage he returned to repeatedly was “Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you.” Turner later said, “I reflected much on this passage, and prayed duly for light on this subject.”

Inspired by a dream of black and white angels fighting, he decided it was time to rise and slay his enemies. In August 1831 Turner and a band of followers killed about 60 white men, women, and children.

Although Turner was captured, tried, and hanged, his actions sent shock waves through the South. State legislatures began to pass harsh laws. As a result of these laws, slaves lost whatever freedom of movement they had. Slaves running errands, for example, now had to carry passes. In addition, whites were forbidden to teach a slave to read or write. Slaves were barred from holding religious meetings. Meanwhile, a movement had begun in Virginia to abolish slavery altogether. Early in 1832 Virginia narrowly rejected a plan for gradual emancipation. With this action died any hope that the South itself would put an end to slavery.

SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERMS** cotton gin, squatter, Second Great Awakening
- 2. PEOPLE AND PLACES** Eli Whitney, New Orleans, Nat Turner
- 3. COMPREHENSION** How did the cotton gin change the South?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** What factors contributed to the movement of people west?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** How was the Cotton Kingdom a creation of the Industrial Revolution?