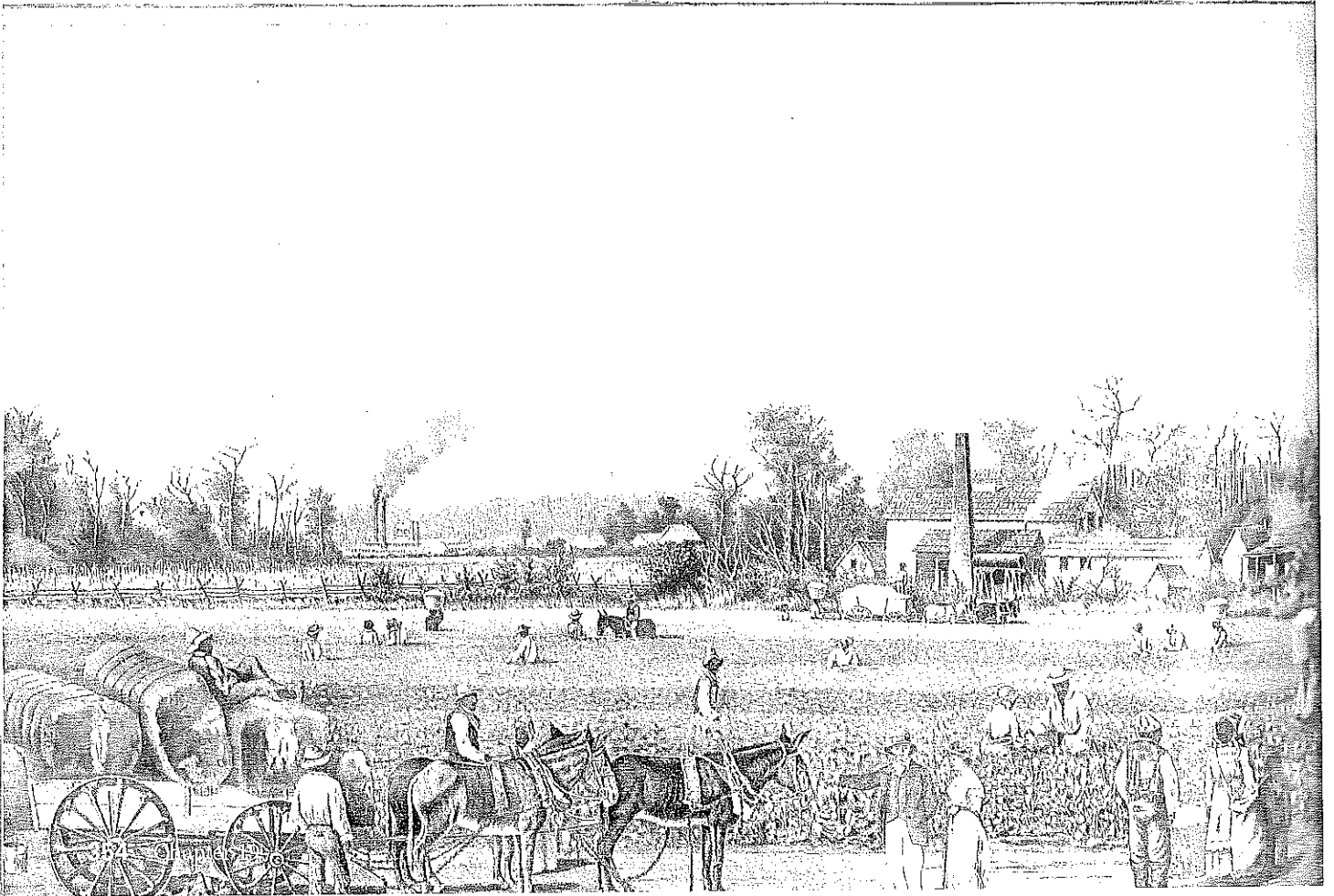


LIFE IN THE SOUTH





19.3 Geography of the South

The South extended from Maryland south to Florida and from the Atlantic Coast west to Louisiana and Texas. Climate and natural features encouraged Southerners to base their way of life on agriculture.

Climate Compared to the North, the Southern states enjoyed mild winters and long, hot, humid summers. Plentiful rainfall and long growing seasons made this a perfect place for raising warm-weather crops that would have withered and died farther north.

Natural Features Wide coastal plains edged the southern shoreline from Chesapeake Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. These fertile lowlands stretched inland for as much as 300 miles in parts of the South.

Along the coast, the plains were dotted with swamps and marshes. These damp lowlands were ideal for growing rice and sugarcane, which thrived in warm, soggy soil. Indigo was grown on the dry land above the swamps, and tobacco and corn were farmed farther inland. A visitor to this area noted that “the Planters by the richness of the Soil, live [in] the most easie and pleasant Manner of any People I have ever met with.”

Above the plains rose the Appalachians. Settlers who ventured into this rugged backcountry carved farms and orchards out of rolling hills and mountain hollows. Some backcountry farmers worked on land so steep that it was joked that they kept falling out of their cornfields.

Although most people in the South were farmers, Southerners used natural resources in other ways as well. In North Carolina, they harvested thick pine forests for lumber. From Chesapeake Bay in Virginia and Maryland, they gathered fish, oysters, and crabs.

An especially important feature of the South was its broad, flat rivers. Many of the South’s earliest towns were built at the mouths of rivers. As people moved away from the coast, they followed the rivers inland, building their homes and farms alongside these water highways. Oceangoing ships could even sail up Southern rivers to conduct business right at a planter’s private dock. Here, the ships were loaded with tobacco or other cash crops for sale in the Caribbean or Europe.

This photograph shows a Southern waterway. What geographic features can you identify?

agrarian a person who favors an agricultural way of life and government policies that support agricultural interests

plantation a large area of privately owned land where crops were grown through the labor of workers who lived on the land

cotton gin a hand-operated machine that cleans seeds and other unwanted material from cotton

19.4 Economy of the South

The South's economy was based on agriculture. Most white Southerners were agrarians who favored a way of life based on farming. This was especially true of rich plantation owners, who did not have to do the hard work of growing crops themselves.

Although most white Southerners worked their own small farms, plantation owners used slaves to grow such cash crops as tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and indigo. By the early 1790s, however, the use of slaves had begun to decline. Europeans were unwilling to pay high prices for tobacco and rice, which they could purchase more cheaply from other British colonies. Cotton was a promising crop, but growers who experimented with it had a hard time making a profit. Until some way was found to clean the seeds out of its fiber easily, cotton was of little value. Discouraged planters were buying fewer slaves, and even letting some go free.

In 1793, a young Yale graduate named Eli Whitney took a job tutoring children on a Georgia plantation. There, he saw his first cotton boll. Observing the way cotton was cleaned by hand, Whitney had an idea. "If a machine could be invented which would clean the Cotton with expedition [speed]," he wrote his father, "it would be a great thing . . . to the Country."

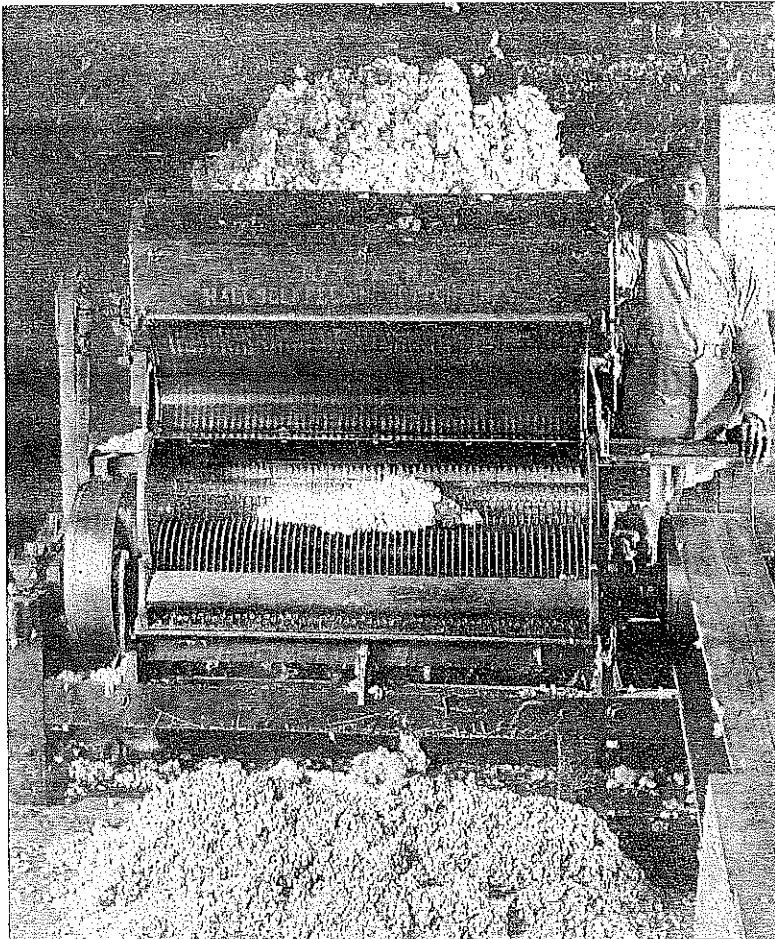
Whitney set to work. Six months later, he had a working machine that would change agriculture in the South.

The Impact of the Cotton Gin

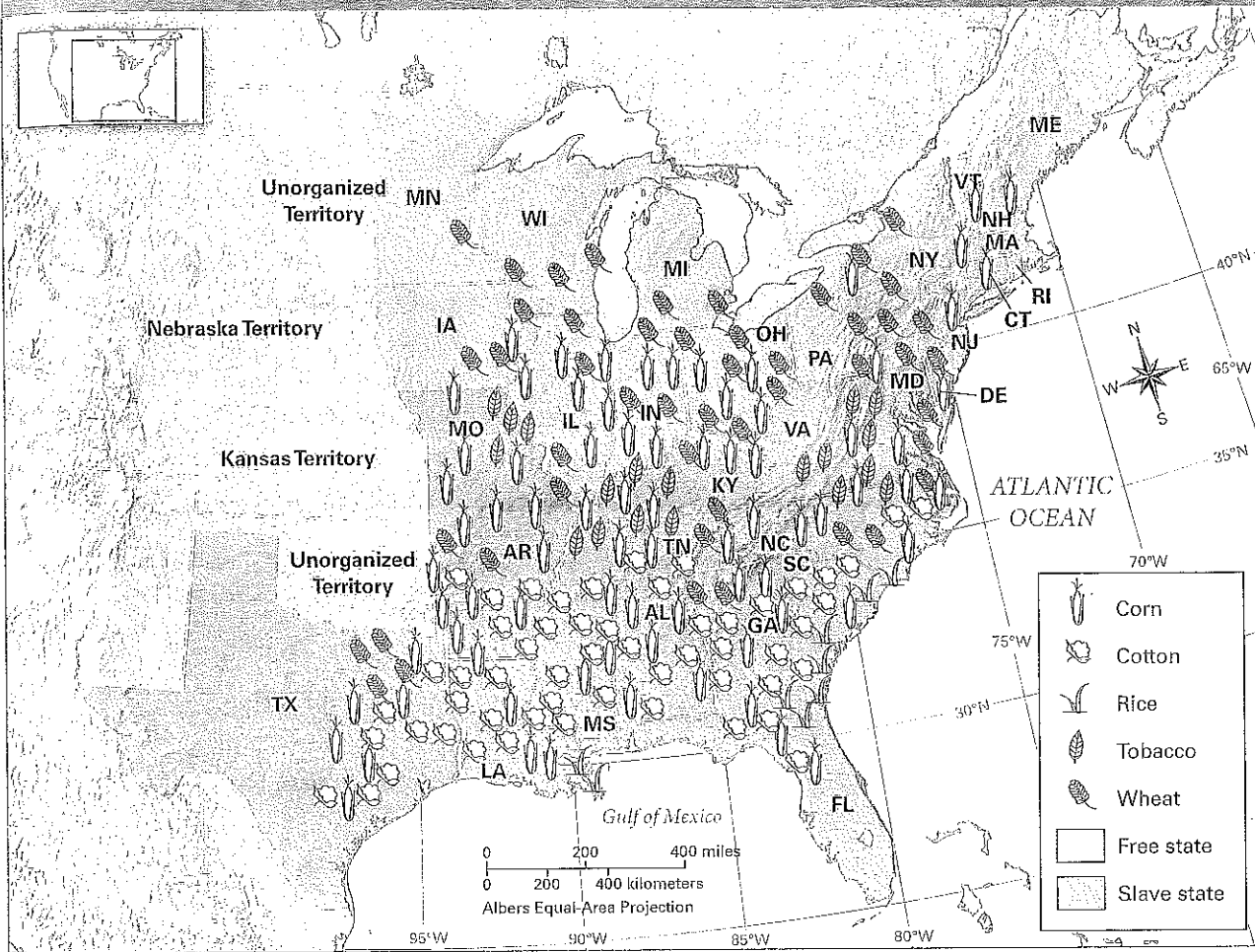
Whitney's "cotton engine," called the **cotton gin** for short, was a simple machine that used rotating combs to separate cotton fiber from its seeds. Using a cotton gin, a single worker could clean as much cotton as 50 laborers working **manually**, or by hand.

Across the South, planters began growing cotton. Within ten years, cotton was the South's most important crop. By 1860, sales of cotton overseas earned more than all other U.S. exports combined.

The cotton gin, invented in 1793, made the process of separating cotton fiber from the seeds quicker and easier. As a result, cotton quickly became the most important crop in the South.



U.S. Agriculture, 1860



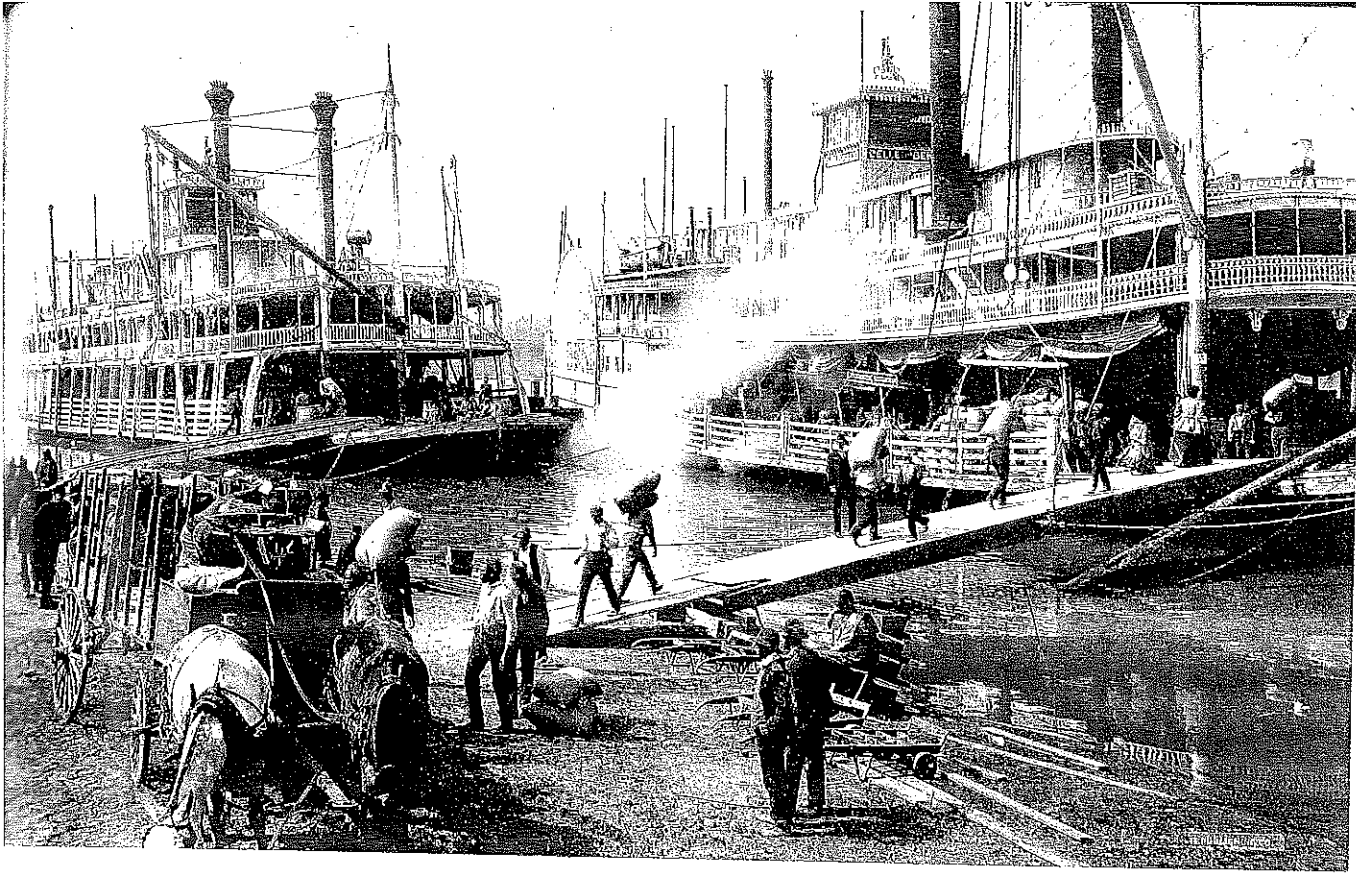
Expanding Demand for Land and Slaves Raising cotton in the same fields year after year soon wore out the soil. In search of fresh, fertile soil, cotton planters pushed west. By 1850, cotton plantations stretched from the Atlantic Coast to Texas.

Whitney had hoped his invention would lighten the work of slaves. Instead, it made slavery more important to the South than ever. As cotton spread westward, slavery followed. Between 1790 and 1850, the number of slaves in the South rose from 500,000 to more than 3 million.

With many white Southerners putting money into land and slaves, the South had little interest in building factories. As a result, wrote an Alabama newspaper, "We purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North . . . the slaveholder dresses in Northern goods, rides in a Northern saddle, sports his Northern carriage, reads Northern books. In Northern vessels his products are carried to market."

One successful Southern factory was the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. Using mostly slave labor, the factory made ammunition and weapons for the U.S. army, as well as steam engines, rails, and locomotives. But the vast majority of white Southerners made their living off the land.

This map shows the primary agricultural products of the United States in 1860. Which crops were primarily grown in the North? Which crops were primarily grown in the South?



19.7 Transportation in the South

Most of the rail lines in the United States were in the North. In the South, people and goods continued to move on rivers. The slow current and broad channels of Southern rivers made water travel easy and relatively cheap.

Cotton was the most important Southern product shipped by water. On plantation docks, slaves loaded cotton bales directly onto steam-powered riverboats. The riverboats then traveled hundreds of miles downstream to such port cities as Savannah, Georgia, or Mobile, Alabama. West of the Appalachians, most cotton moved down the Mississippi River, the largest of all the Southern waterways. The cotton boom made New Orleans, the port at the mouth of the Mississippi, one of the South's few big cities. Once the cotton reached the sea, it was loaded onto sailing ships headed for ports in England or the North.

Because river travel was the South's main form of transportation, most Southern towns and cities sprang up along waterways. With little need for roads or canals to connect these settlements, Southerners opposed bills in Congress that would use federal funds for internal improvements. Such projects, they believed, would benefit the North far more than the South.

Some railroads were built in the South, including lines that helped Southern farmers ship their products to the North. Southerners were proud of the fact that the iron rails for many of the area's railroads came from Virginia's Tredegar Iron Works. Still, in 1860 the South had just 10,000 miles of rail, compared with over 20,000 miles in the North.

This photograph shows products being loaded onto steam-powered riverboats. What geographic feature of the South made riverboats the most practical way to transport goods?



The Granger Collection, New York

Wealthy Southern planters modeled their homes and lives on European nobility. Their large mansions had tall columns and fancy gardens. Most Southern whites, however, owned or worked on small farms, with few of the luxuries enjoyed by the rich.

that divided them from many churches in the North, whose leaders taught that slavery was un-Christian. In the words of one historian, "The South grew, but it did not develop."

White Southerners A small group of wealthy plantation owners dominated the economy and politics of the South. They enjoyed a leisurely way of life, filled with parties and social visits. While their sons often went to colleges and universities, their daughters received little education. Instead, girls were brought up to be wives and hostesses.

Most white families owned some land, but only about one in four owned even one slave. The majority of white families worked their own fields and made most of what they needed themselves. About 10 percent of whites were too poor to own any land. They rented rugged mountain or forest land and paid the rent with the crops they raised. Since public schools were few and often inferior to those in the North, many white children were illiterate.

African Americans in the South A small minority of the African Americans in the South were free blacks. Free blacks were often forced to wear special badges, pay extra taxes, and live separately from whites. Most lived in towns and cities, where they found jobs as skilled craftspeople, servants, or laborers.

The great majority of African Americans in the South were slaves. Some worked as cooks, carpenters, blacksmiths, house servants, or nursemaids. But most were field hands who labored from dawn until past dusk.

19.8 Society in the South

For the most part, the South was not greatly affected by the Jacksonian spirit of equality and opportunity or the reform movements of the mid-1800s. Many Southerners in 1860 still measured wealth in terms of land and slaves. The result was a rigid social structure with a few rich plantation owners at the top, white farmers and workers in the middle, and African Americans—mostly enslaved—at the bottom.

Slavery deeply affected the lives of all Southerners, black and white. As long as the slave economy could be preserved, the South had little incentive to make progress economically or culturally. Even religion was affected. Southern church leaders defended the practice—taking a position