

Plantations and Slavery Spread

One American's Story

Catherine Beale was born into slavery in 1838. In 1929, she recalled her childhood on a Southern plantation.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“We had to work in the field in the day and at night we had to pick out the seed before we went to bed. And we had to clean the wool, we had to pick the burrs and sticks out so it would be clean and could be carded and spun and wove.”

—Catherine Beale, quoted in *Slave Testimony*



Workers picking cotton in Texas

Catherine had to clean cotton by hand, probably because the plantation didn't have a **cotton gin**. This machine made cleaning cotton much faster. As a result, it became more profitable to grow cotton—and to own slaves.

The Cotton Boom

KEY QUESTION How did the invention of the cotton gin change Southern life?

The Industrial Revolution increased the number of goods being produced. It also increased the demand for raw materials. In England, textile mills needed huge quantities of cotton to produce goods to sell throughout the British Empire. Cotton growers in the South wanted to meet this demand.

The Cotton Gin The short-fibered cotton that grew in most parts of the South was hard to clean by hand. A worker could clean just one pound of this cotton in a day. Then, in 1793, **Eli Whitney** invented a machine for cleaning cotton. With the new machine, one worker could clean as much as 50 pounds of cotton a day. The cotton gin helped set the South on a very different course of economic development than the North.

Connecting History

Human Rights

As slavery expanded in the South, an antislavery movement spread in the North. By the 1840s, the movement to abolish slavery had become a political force.

See Chapter 14,
pages 465–468

Slavery Expands From 1790 to 1860, cotton production increased more than a thousandfold, thanks in large part to the new cotton gin. Using slave labor, the South raised millions of bales of cotton each year for the textile mills of England and the American Northeast.

As cotton production grew, so did the demand for slavery. In 1808, it became illegal to import Africans for use as slaves. At the same time, however, the birth rate among the enslaved population already in the country began to increase rapidly. Between 1810 and 1840, the enslaved population in the South more than doubled.

Southern Support for Slavery Slavery divided white Southerners into those who held slaves and those who did not. Slaveholders with large plantations were the wealthiest and most powerful people in the South, but they were relatively few in number. Only about one-third of white families owned slaves in 1840. Of these slave-owning families, only about one-tenth had large plantations with 20 or more slaves.

Although most Southern farmers owned few or no slaves, many supported slavery anyway. They hoped to buy slaves someday, which would allow them to raise more cotton and earn more money.

▲ **CAUSES AND EFFECTS** Explain how the cotton gin changed Southern life.

African Americans in the South

▼ **KEY QUESTION** What was life like for African Americans in the South?

By 1840, enslaved people formed about a third of the South's population.

Varied Conditions About half of enslaved people worked on plantations. Conditions could be cruel, as a former slave recalled decades later.

PRIMARY SOURCE

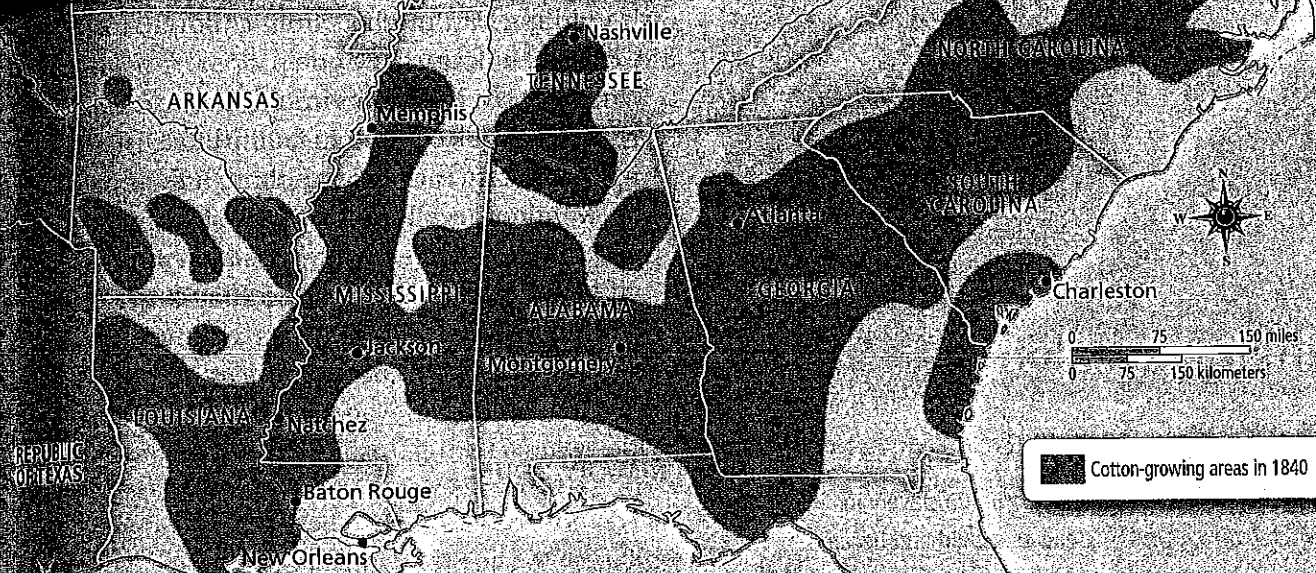
“The overseer was ‘straddle his big horse at three o’clock in the mornin’, roustin’ the hands off to the field . . . The rows was a mile long and no matter how much grass [weeds] was in them, if you [left] one sprig on your row they [beat] you nearly to death.”

—Wes Brady, quoted in *Remembering Slavery*

Not all enslaved people labored on plantations. In cities, some worked as domestic servants, skilled craftsmen, factory hands, and day laborers. Some were hired out and allowed to keep part of their earnings. But they were still enslaved—under the law, they were considered property.

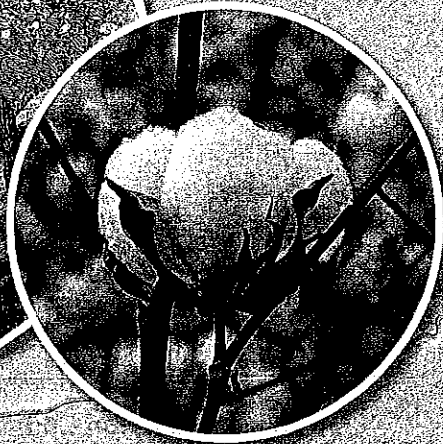
In 1840, about 5 percent of African Americans in the South were free. They had either been born free, been freed by an owner, or bought their own freedom. Although they were not enslaved, they still faced many problems. Some states made them leave once they gained their freedom. Most states did not permit them to vote or to be educated. Many employers refused to hire them. But the biggest threat was the possibility of being captured and sold into slavery.

The Cotton Kingdom 1840



Gulf of Mexico

(left) Slave labor was the backbone of the cotton kingdom. (below) The seeds of the cotton plant are surrounded by soft, white fibers.



Connect Geography & History

- 1. Human-Environment Interaction**
Which six states had the largest areas devoted to growing cotton?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction**
How far north was cotton grown?

CAUSE

Whitney's cotton gin (short for "engine") made short-fibered cotton a commercially successful product. This changed Southern life in four important ways.

EFFECTS

- Cotton plantations were no longer limited to Atlantic coastal states, where long-fibered cotton grew.
- Planters grew more cotton than other goods; cotton exports increased.
- Native Americans were driven off land that was taken to grow cotton.
- Slavery expanded, especially westward to new cotton plantations.



History Makers

Nat Turner 1800–1831

Nat Turner (above left) was born into slavery in Virginia. He learned to read as a child and became an enthusiastic reader of the Bible. Enslaved people gathered in forest clearings to listen to Turner's powerful sermons.

In 1831, Turner led a group of followers in killing about 55 white Virginians, starting with the family of his former owner. It was the bloodiest slave rebellion in American history. In an account of events that he dictated to Thomas R. Gray before his execution, Turner called himself a "prophet" and said that God had called him to commit his violent acts.

CRITICAL THINKING Analyze Point of View How did Turner justify his use of violence?



ONLINE
BIOGRAPHY

For more on Nat Turner, go to the
Research & Writing Center
@ ClassZone.com

Families Under Slavery Perhaps the cruelest part of slavery was the sale of family members away from one another. Although some slaveholders would not part mothers from children, many did, causing unforgettable grief.

When enslaved families could manage to be together, they took comfort in family life. Enslaved people did marry each other, although their marriages were not legally recognized. They tried to raise children, while knowing that their children could be taken from them and sold at any time. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who was born into slavery, recalled visits from his mother, who lived 12 miles away.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“I do not recollect [remember] ever seeing my mother by the light of day. She was with me in the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone.”

—Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Douglass's mother resisted slavery by the simple act of visiting her child. Douglass later rebelled by escaping to the North. A small number of enslaved people rebelled in violent ways.

Slave Rebellions Armed rebellion by enslaved persons was an extreme form of resistance to slavery. Gabriel Prosser planned an attack on Richmond, Virginia, in 1800. In 1822, Denmark Vesey planned a revolt in Charleston, South Carolina. Both plots were betrayed and the leaders, as well as numerous followers, were hanged.

The most famous rebellion was led by **Nat Turner** in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831. Beginning on August 21, Turner and 70 followers killed about 55 white men, women, and children. Most

of Turner's men were captured when their ammunition ran out, and some were killed. After Turner was caught, he was tried and hanged.

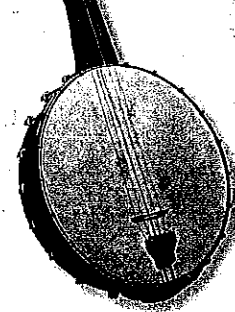
Turner's rebellion spread fear in the South. Whites killed more than 200 African Americans in revenge. The state of Virginia considered ending slavery because of the upheaval, but the proposal was narrowly defeated. Some state legislatures, however, passed harsh laws that further limited the freedom of both free and enslaved African Americans. For African Americans in the South, the grip of slavery grew even tighter.

A Common Culture By the early 1800s, a distinctive African-American culture had emerged on Southern plantations. This common culture helped enslaved African Americans bond together and endure the brutal conditions of Southern plantation life.

Religion was a cornerstone of African-American culture in the South. Some slaveholders had tried to use religion to force enslaved people to accept mistreatment, emphasizing such Bible passages as "Servants, obey your masters." But enslaved people took their own messages from the Bible. They were particularly inspired by the book of Exodus, which tells of Moses leading the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt. Many enslaved African Americans believed that this story offered a message of hope for their own people.

Enslaved people expressed their beliefs in **spirituals**—folk songs that were often religious in nature. Many spirituals voiced the desire for freedom. Sometimes, spirituals contained coded messages about a planned escape or an owner's unexpected return. African-American spirituals later had a strong influence on blues, jazz, and other forms of American music.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST Compare the different conditions faced by African Americans in the South.



(top) *The Old Plantation*, late 1700s.

(above) Enslaved Africans brought the banjo to the American colonies.



Section Assessment



ONLINE QUIZ

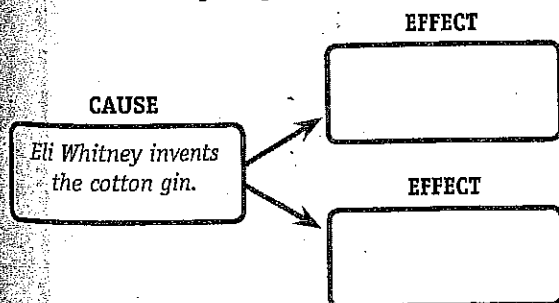
For test practice, go to
Interactive Review @ ClassZone.com

TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of
- cotton gin
 - Eli Whitney
 - Nat Turner

USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Causes and Effects** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of this section.



KEY IDEAS

3. How did the invention of the cotton gin change Southern life?
4. What forms did resistance to slavery take?

CRITICAL THINKING

5. **Analyze Point of View** Why did many Southern farmers who owned no slaves support slavery?
6. **Connect Economics and History** The cotton gin made it possible to clean the same amount of cotton with fewer workers. Why did this result in an increased demand for slaves?
7. **Art** Choose an African-American spiritual. Write down and illustrate the lyrics, drawing any images or symbols used in the spiritual.