Chapter 14 Lesson 3

Southern Cotton Kingdom

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why do people make economic choices?

The demand for cotton deepened the white South's commitment to slavery and a slave-based economy.

Rise of the Cotton Kingdom

How were the economies of the South and North different?

In the early years of the United States, the South had an economy based almost entirely on farming, despite the fact that settlers had developed only a small part of the region. Most Southerners lived in the Upper South, an area along the Atlantic coast in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. A few people had also settled in Georgia and South Carolina.

By 1850, the South had changed. Its population had spread inland to the Deep South. This region includes Georgia and South Carolina, as well as Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. The economy of the South was thriving. That economy depended, however, on slavery. In fact, slavery grew stronger than ever in the South, while it all but disappeared in the North.

Cotton Is King

Southern planters grew mainly rice, indigo, and tobacco in colonial times. After the American Revolution, demand for these crops decreased. European mills now wanted Southern cotton.

Raising a cotton crop took a large amount of time and labor. After the harvest, workers had to carefully separate the plant's sticky seeds from the cotton fibers.

Eli Whitney solved this problem with his invention of the cotton gin in 1793. Whitney's gin quickly and easily removed seeds from cotton fibers. With a cotton gin, productivity (proh • duhk • TIH • vuh • tee)—the amount a worker can produce in a given time—shot up. The cotton gin helped workers process 50 times more cotton each day than they could by hand.

The use of the cotton gin had important consequences. It encouraged farmers to grow more cotton in more places. Because Southern planters relied on enslaved workers to plant and pick their cotton, the demand for slave labor increased. Slavery spread across a larger area of the South.

By 1860, the Deep South and Upper South remained agricultural, but each region concentrated on different crops. The Upper South grew more tobacco, hemp, wheat, and vegetables. The Deep South produced more cotton, as well as rice and sugarcane.

Because more workers were needed to produce cotton and sugar, the sale of enslaved Africans became a big business. The Upper South became a center for the sale and transport of enslaved people. This trade became known as the domestic slave trade.

Describing What effect did the cotton gin have on the South’s economy?

Southern Industry

Why did industry develop slowly in the South?

﻿Industry developed more slowly in the South than in the North. Why was this so? One reason was the boom in cotton. Agriculture, especially cotton farming, produced great profits. Building new industry is costly. Planters would have had to sell enslaved people or land to raise the money to build factories. They chose instead to invest in profitable agriculture—including enslaved Africans.﻿

In addition, the market for manufactured goods in the South was small. Enslaved people, who made up a large share of the population, had no money to buy goods. This limited local market discouraged industries from developing.

For these reasons, some white Southerners simply did not want industry. One Texas politician, Louis Wigfall, summed up that Southern point of view:

"We want no manufactures: we desire no trading, no mechanical or manufacturing classes. As long as we have our rice, our sugar, our tobacco and our cotton, we can command wealth to purchase all we want."

—quoted in Louis T. Wigfall, Southern Fire-Eater

Factories in the South

Some Southern leaders wanted to develop industry in the region. They thought that the South depended too much on the North for manufactured goods. These leaders also argued that factories would improve the economy of the Upper? South.

William Gregg of South Carolina shared this view. He opened his own textile factory. Georgia’s Augustin Clayton also went into textiles, opening a cotton mill. In Virginia, Joseph Reid Anderson made Tredegar Iron Works one of the nation’s leading iron producers. The Alabama Iron Works also included a sawmill for producing lumber. These industries, however, were not typical of the South.

Southern Transportation

In general, farmers and the few manufacturers of the South relied on natural waterways to transport their goods. Most towns were located on coasts or along rivers because canals were scarce and roads were poor.

Southern rail lines were short, local, and not linked together. The South had fewer railroads than the North. This caused Southern cities to grow more slowly than Northern cities, where railways were major routes of commerce and settlement. The rail networks in the North also gave Northern manufacturers an advantage over their Southern competitors. Lower shipping costs allowed Northerners to charge less for their goods. By 1860, only about one-third of the nation’s rail lines lay within the South. This rail shortage would hurt the South in the years to come.

Explaining How did slavery affect the development of the Southern economy?