

Explore More—Slavery in the South

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about the gradual institutionalization of slavery in the South. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

How did slavery in the United States begin?

The Jamestown colonists planted the first tobacco plants in 1612. In 1619, a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans to work in the tobacco fields. These Africans were indentured servants. By 1670, almost 3,000 Africans had been brought to Virginia. By the early 1700s, the Southern legislatures began to pass laws restricting the rights of Africans. Southerners began to think of Africans as property.

When did owners begin to sell slaves?

By the end of the 1700s, the land planted with tobacco was worn out from too much planting. Some farmers moved to more fertile land in Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi. Other farmers stayed and began to plant crops such as corn and wheat. These crops did not require as much work as tobacco, so the owners of the plantations began to sell their slaves.

How did the invention of the cotton gin affect slavery?

The cotton gin was a machine that could clean cotton quickly. Cotton growers began making a lot of money once they started using machines like the cotton gin. People bought more land to plant cotton. They also bought more slaves. Between 1820 and 1830, cotton production in the South doubled. By 1860, cotton made up two-thirds of the total exports of the United States.

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Was slavery increasing in the North, too?

Slavery was not increasing in the northern states. While the South focused on agriculture, the North focused on developing industries. The North manufactured many products, including textile and steel. The South focused on growing cash crops such as tobacco and rice, but especially cotton.

What was life like for slaves in the South?

Some slaves, called field hands, worked in the fields from early in the morning until dark. They were required to pick 150-200 pounds of cotton a day. During harvest time, they often worked 18 hours a day. A supervisor watched over them and hit them with a long whip if they slowed down.

Another group of slaves, usually women, worked in the plantation house. They served food, cleaned the houses, and took care of the planters' children. Some house slaves slept on the floor at the end of their masters' beds. During harvest time, they often were sent to the fields to work.

Many slaves were treated very cruelly. Slave owners often punished their slaves if they did not work hard enough or disobeyed orders. Slaves were considered property that could be bought and sold. They were not free to go where they wanted and to make decisions about their lives. Often families were separated when a husband or wife was sold to other owners.

Did slaves fight back?

In 1822, a free black named Denmark Vesey talked a group of slaves into helping him to try to capture the city of Charleston, South Carolina. Before they could even try, one of the people in the group turned them in. A trial was held, and 37 of the slaves were sentenced to death. In 1831, a slave named Nat Turner gathered a group of slaves and led them in a slave rebellion that resulted in the death of whites. As a result of these types of incidents, Southern states passed laws that made it illegal to set slaves free. The Southern states also continued to enforce the laws that had been passed during colonial times. Slaves tried to fight back, but the laws that took away their rights made it very difficult.

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Who were the abolitionists?

Abolitionists were people who worked to end slavery. You will learn more about abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth and William Lloyd Garrison in Unit 7. Many Southern states tried to stop abolitionists from spreading antislavery literature. Georgia passed a law requiring the death penalty for anyone found guilty of distributing literature that encouraged slaves to fight back.

Why did so many Southerners support slavery?

Many Southerners believed they needed slave labor to grow cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, rice, and sugar. They called slavery a “necessary evil.” After the abolitionists increased their attacks on slavery, however, Southerners began to defend slavery. In the North, more and more people were attacking slavery, but in the South it became more and more dangerous to criticize it in public.

Why were the North and South so different during this period?

By the 1850s, the North and South had developed into very different economies. The North had many small farms as well as large industrial and urban areas. The South was overwhelmingly agricultural. There were other differences, too. Social reforms such as women’s rights and public education had changed the way people in the North thought. These ideas were not popular with many Southerners. And of course, there was the issue of slavery. These differences led to a growing hostility between the North and the South. You will learn more about this conflict in Unit 7. ❖

YOUR TURN!

1. List at least two causes and two effects of slavery in the United States.

Causes	Effects

2. Southerners said slavery was necessary in order to grow cash crops and make money. Today, we know that the cost was not worth the benefit. Can you think of something happening now in which the cost is not worth the benefit? Write your ideas below.
