

# 2 Plantations and Slavery Spread

**TERMS & NAMES**  
Eli Whitney  
cotton gin  
spirituals  
Nat Turner

## MAIN IDEA

The invention of the cotton gin and the demand for cotton caused slavery to spread in the South.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The spread of slavery created lasting racial and sectional tensions.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Catherine Beale was born into slavery in 1838. At the age of 91, in 1929, she recalled her childhood on a Virginia plantation. When asked what games she had played, Catherine replied that enslaved children never played games—they were too busy with chores. Among the tasks were picking and cleaning cotton.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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*

Catherine had to clean cotton by hand because the plantation didn't have a cotton gin. This machine made it easier for enslaved workers to clean cotton. But it also made cotton growing and slave owning more profitable. In this section, you will learn how slavery expanded in the South and how it affected the lives of people living under it.

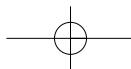


Enslaved workers labor in the cotton fields.

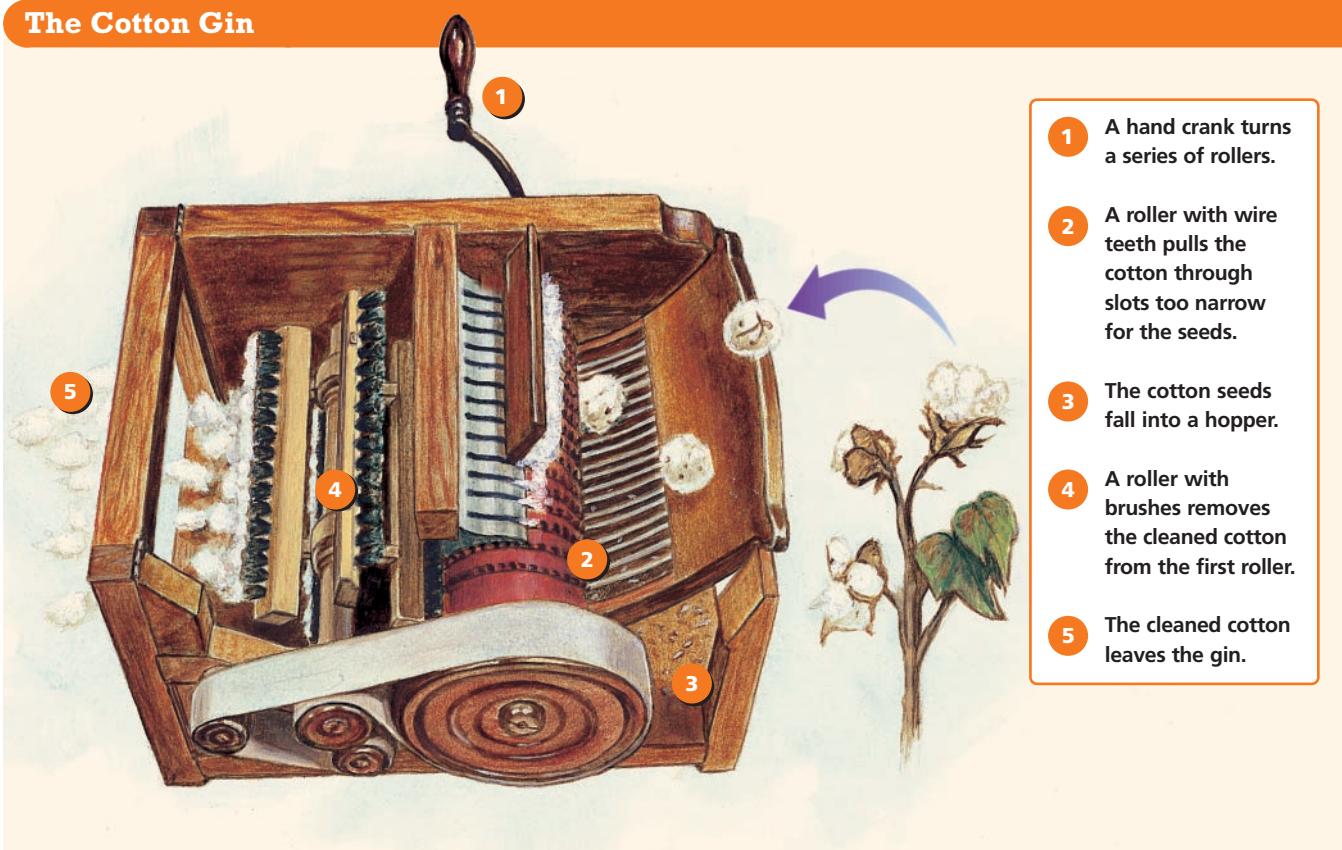
## The Cotton Boom

Eli Whitney invented a machine for cleaning cotton in 1793, after visiting the Georgia plantation of Catherine Greene, the widow of a Revolutionary War general. Mrs. Greene was struggling to make her plantation profitable. English textile mills had created a huge demand for cotton, but 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.

Whitney's cotton gin (short for “engine”) made the cotton-cleaning process far more efficient. With the new machine, one worker could now clean as much as 50 pounds of cotton a day. The cotton gin helped set the South on a different course of development from the North. It made



## The Cotton Gin



short-fibered cotton a commercial product and changed Southern life in four important ways.

### ***Reading History***

- A. Reading a Map** Use the map on page 334 to find cotton-growing areas in 1840.

### ***Reading History***

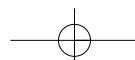
- B. Recognizing Effects** What impact did the cotton gin have on the South?

1. It triggered a vast move westward. Cotton farming moved beyond the Atlantic coastal states, where long-fibered, easy-to-clean cotton grew. Cotton plantations began to spread into northern Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Then they crossed into Louisiana and Arkansas. After 1840, they reached Texas.
2. Because cotton was valuable, planters grew more cotton rather than other goods, and cotton exports increased.
3. More Native American groups were driven off Southern land as it was taken over for cotton plantations.
4. Growing cotton required a large work force, and slavery continued to be important as a source of labor. Many slaves from the east were sold south and west to new cotton plantations.

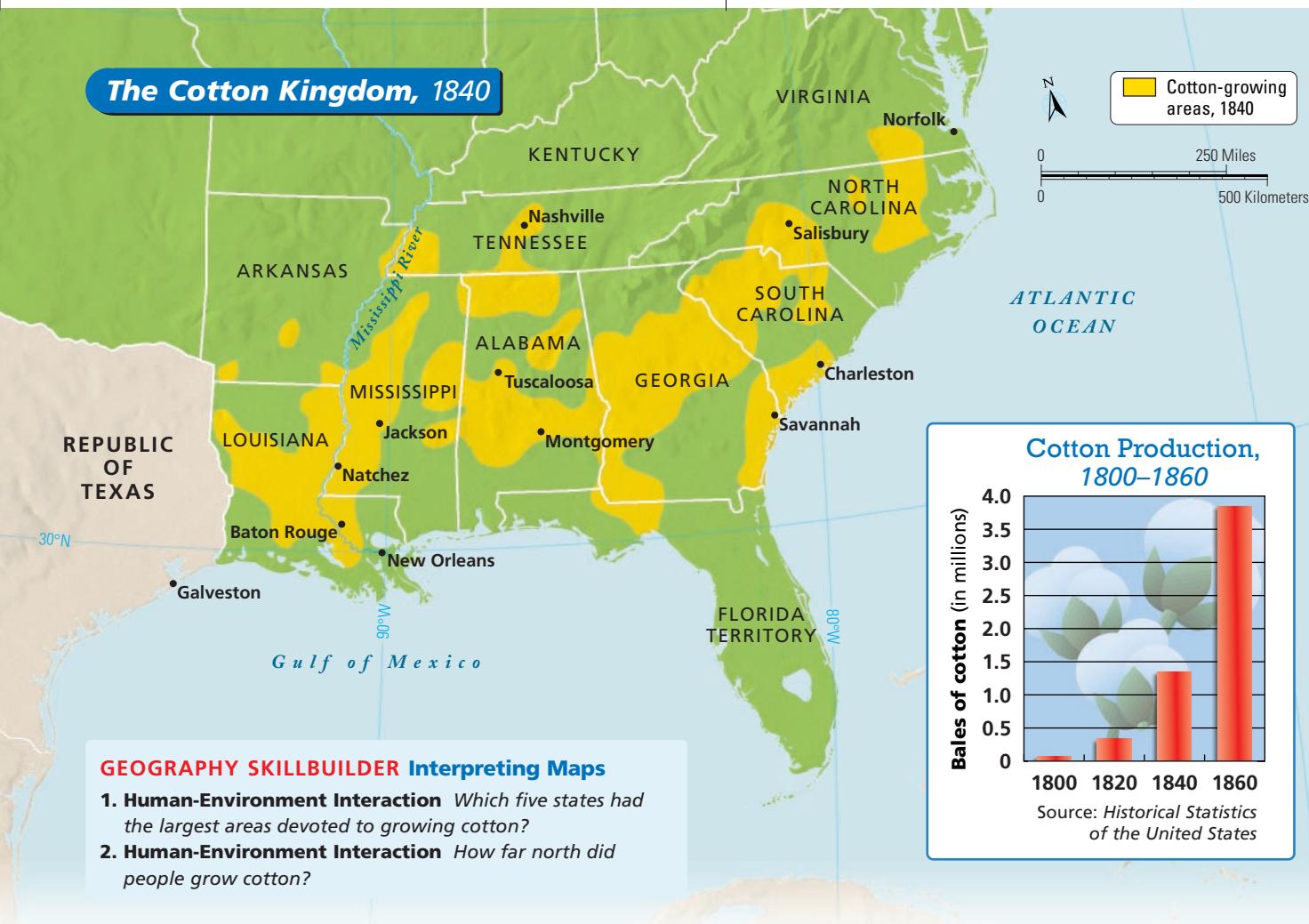
## Slavery Expands

From 1790 to 1860, cotton production rose greatly. So did the number of enslaved people in the South. Using slave labor, the South raised millions of bales of cotton each year for the textile mills of England and the American Northeast. (See the graph on page 334.) In 1820, the South earned \$22 million from cotton exports. By the late 1830s, earnings from cotton exports were nearly ten times greater, close to \$200 million.

As cotton earnings rose, so did the price of slaves. A male field hand sold for \$300 in the 1790s. By the late 1830s, the price had jumped to



## The Cotton Kingdom, 1840



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

- Human-Environment Interaction** Which five states had the largest areas devoted to growing cotton?
- Human-Environment Interaction** How far north did people grow cotton?

\$1,000. After 1808, when it became illegal to import Africans for use as slaves, the trading of slaves already in the country increased.

The expansion of slavery had a major impact on the South's economy. But its effect on the people living there was even greater.

## Slavery Divides the South

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.

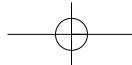
Most white Southern farmers owned few or no slaves. Still, many supported slavery anyway. They worked their small farms themselves and hoped to buy slaves someday, which would allow them to raise more cotton and earn more money. For both small farmers and large planters, slavery had become necessary for increasing profits.

### Reading History

- C. Analyzing Points of View**  
Why did many white farmers without slaves still support slavery?

## African Americans in the South

Slavery also divided black Southerners into those who were enslaved and those who were free. Enslaved African Americans formed about one-third of the South's population in 1840. About half of them



worked on large plantations with white overseers. Decades later, a former slave described the routine in an interview.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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*

#### ReadingHistory

- D. Contrasting  
How was plantation slavery different from slavery in cities?

Not all slaves faced the back-breaking conditions of plantations. In cities, enslaved persons worked as domestic servants, skilled craftsmen, factory hands, and day laborers. Sometimes they were hired out and allowed to keep part of their earnings. Frederick Douglass, an African-American speaker and publisher, once commented, "A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation." But they were still enslaved.

In 1840, about 8 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. Many free African Americans in the South lived in cities such as Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

Though not enslaved, free blacks faced many problems. Some states made them leave once they gained their freedom. Most states did not permit them to vote or receive an education. Many employers refused to hire them. But their biggest threat was the possibility of being captured and sold into slavery.

### Finding Strength in Religion

An African-American culture had emerged on plantations by the early 1800s. Slaves relied on that culture—with its strong religious convictions, close personal bonds, and abundance of music—to help them endure the brutal conditions of plantation life.

Some slaveholders tried to use religion to make slaves accept their treatment. White ministers stressed such Bible passages as "Servants, obey your masters." But enslaved people took their own messages from the Bible. They were particularly inspired by the story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt.

Enslaved people expressed their religious beliefs in **spirituals**, religious folk songs. Spirituals often contained coded messages about a planned escape or an owner's unexpected return. African-American spirituals later influenced blues, jazz, and other forms of American music.

#### daily Life

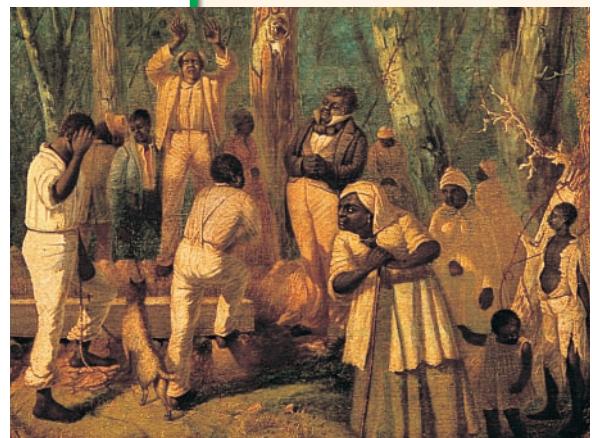
##### SPIRITUALS

Singing spirituals offered comfort for pain, bound people together at religious meetings, and eased the boredom of daily tasks. This verse came from a spiritual sung by slaves in Missouri.

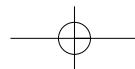
*Dear Lord, dear lord,  
when slavery'll cease  
Then we poor souls  
will have our peace;—  
There's a better day a coming,  
Will you go along with me?  
There's a better day a coming,  
Go sound the jubilee!*

#### ReadingHistory

- E. Making  
Inferences Why would enslaved African Americans be inspired by the biblical story of Moses?



Detail of *Plantation Burial*, (1860), John Antrobus.



## Families Under Slavery

Perhaps the cruellest 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 people ran away, it was often to escape separation or to see family again.

When slave families could manage to be together, they took comfort in their family life. They married, though their marriages were not legally recognized. They tried to raise children, despite interference from owners. Most slave children lived with their mothers, who tried to protect them from punishment. Parents who lived on other plantations often stole away to visit their children, even at the cost of a whipping. Frederick Douglass recalled visits from his mother, who lived 12 miles away.

### **Reading History**

**F. Recognizing Effects** How did slavery harm family life?

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

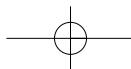
I do not recollect of [remember] ever seeing my mother by the light of day. She was with me in the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone.

**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. Other enslaved people rebelled in more violent ways.

A slave auction threatens to split a family apart.





## Slave Rebellions

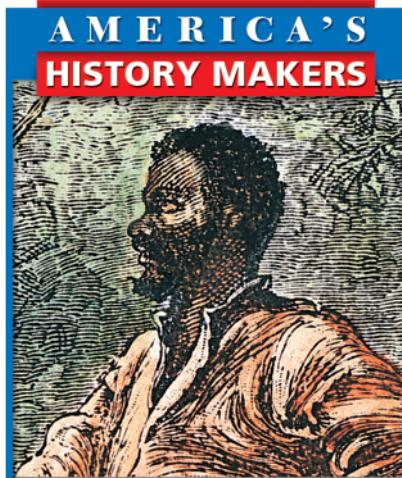
Armed rebellion was an extreme form of resistance to slavery. Gabriel Prosser planned an attack on Richmond, Virginia, in 1800. In 1822, Denmark Vesey planned a revolt in Charleston, South Carolina. Both plots were betrayed, and the leaders were hanged.

The most famous rebellion was led by **Nat Turner** in Virginia in 1831. On August 21, Turner and 70 followers killed 55 white men, women, and children. Later, witnesses claimed that he spoke these words.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

We do not go forth for the sake of blood and carnage; . . . Remember that ours is not a war for robbery, . . . it is a struggle for freedom.

**Nat Turner**, quoted in *Nat Turner*, by Terry Bisson



**NAT TURNER**

1800–1831

Nat Turner was born on a plantation in Virginia. As a child, Turner learned to read and write. He became an enthusiastic reader of the Bible. Slaves gathered in forest clearings to listen to his powerful sermons. Turner believed that God wanted him to free the slaves, even if by armed rebellion. He defended the justice of his cause in what came to be known as *Confessions of Nat Turner*, which he dictated to a white lawyer before his execution.

**How did Turner justify his rebellion?**

### ReadingHistory

**G. Recognizing Effects** How did Nat Turner's rebellion affect white Southerners?

Most of Turner's men were captured when their ammunition ran out, and 16 were killed. When 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. State legislatures passed harsh laws that kept free blacks and slaves from having weapons or buying liquor. Slaves could not hold religious services unless whites were present. Postmasters stopped delivering antislavery publications.

After Turner's rebellion, the grip of slavery grew even tighter in the South. Tension over slavery increased between the South and the North, as you will see in the next section.

## Section 2 Assessment

### 1. Terms & Names

#### Explain the significance of:

- Eli Whitney
- cotton gin
- spirituals
- Nat Turner

### 2. Taking Notes

In a chart like the one below, note facts about each group of Southerners.

Group	Facts
slaveholding whites	
nonslaveholding whites	
enslaved blacks	
free blacks	

Why do you think many free blacks lived in cities?

### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

#### SPEECH

Write a **book report** on a slave narrative, or perform an **oral interpretation** of a passage from one.

### 3. Main Ideas

- How did the cotton gin lead to the spread of slavery?
- How was life different for plantation slaves, city slaves, and free blacks in the South?
- What were three ways that enslaved people resisted slavery?

### 4. Critical Thinking

**Forming Opinions** How do you think slave rebellions affected the institution of slavery?

#### THINK ABOUT

- Nat Turner's reasons for rebelling
- the reaction of white Southerners and slave owners to Turner's rebellion