

COTTON



Panoramic photograph of a cotton plantation from 1907

The American South is known for its long, hot summers, and rich soils in river valleys making it an ideal location for growing cotton. By 1860, Southern plantations supplied 75% of the world's cotton, with shipments from Houston, New Orleans, Charleston, Mobile, Savannah, and a few other ports.

The insatiable European demand for cotton was a result of the Industrial Revolution which created the machinery and factories to process raw cotton into clothing that was better and cheaper than hand-made product. European and New England purchases soared from 720,000 bales in 1830, to 2.85 million bales in 1850, to nearly 5 million in 1860. Cotton production renewed demand for slavery after the tobacco market declined in the late 18th century. The more cotton grown, the more slaves were needed to pick the crop. By 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, cotton accounted for almost 60% of American exports, representing a total value of nearly \$200 million a year.

Cotton's central place in the national economy and its international importance led Senator James Henry Hammond of South Carolina to make a famous boast in 1858:

“Without firing a gun, without drawing a sword, should they make war on us, we could bring the whole world to our feet... What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years?... England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her save the South. No, you dare not to make war on cotton. No power on the earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.”

Southern capitalists sank money into cotton rather than factories or land. More precisely, they invested in slaves; the average slave owner held almost two-thirds of his wealth in slaves in 1860, much less than he held in land.

King Cotton as a slogan summarized the strategy used before the American Civil War of 1861–1865 by pro-secessionists in the Southern States to claim the feasibility of secession and to prove there was no need to fear a war with the Northern States. The theory held that control over cotton exports would make a proposed independent Confederacy economically prosperous, would ruin the textile industry of New England, and—most importantly—would force Great Britain and perhaps France to support the Confederacy militarily because their industrial economies depended on Southern cotton.

The slogan, widely believed throughout the South, helped in mobilizing support for secession: by February 1861, the seven states whose economies were based on cotton plantations had all seceded and formed the Confederacy (C.S.A.). Meanwhile, the other eight slave states, with little or no cotton production, remained in the Union.

To demonstrate the alleged power of King Cotton, Southern cotton-merchants spontaneously refused to ship out their cotton in early 1861; it was not a government decision. By summer 1861, the Union Navy blockaded every major Confederate port and shut down over 95% of exports. Since the British mills had large stockpiles of cotton, they suffered no immediate injury from the embargo; indeed the value of their stockpiles soared. For Britain to have intervened would have meant war with the U.S. and a cut-off of food supplies. About one fourth of Britain's food supplies came from the United States, and American warships could destroy much of British commerce, while the Royal Navy was convoying ships full of cotton. The British never believed in "King Cotton", and they never intervened. Consequently, the strategy proved a failure for the Confederacy—King Cotton did not help the new nation, but the blockade prevented earning desperately-needed gold. Most important, the false belief led to unrealistic assumptions that the war would be won through European intervention if only the Confederacy held out long enough

After the war ended in 1865, the future of cotton land remained under white southern control. Northern Republican businessmen were firmly opposed to confiscation of lands from southern plantation owners and actively supported the resumption of cotton production by means of large plantations under the management of landowners.

Therefore, the stage for Reconstruction was set. The economic importance of cotton had not diminished after the war. In fact, the federal government and northern capitalists were well aware that restoration of cotton production was critical to the financial recovery of the nation. Cotton exports were needed to help reduce the huge federal debt and to stabilize monetary affairs in order to fund economic development, particularly railroads.

America regained its sought-after position as the world's leading producer of cotton. By 1870, sharecroppers, small farmers, and plantation owners in the American south had produced more cotton than they had in 1860, and by 1880, they exported more cotton than they had in 1860. For 134 years, from 1803 to 1937, America was the world's leading cotton exporter.

Slavery and Cotton Production

Year	Slaves	Cotton
1790	750,000	3,000 bales
1800	1,000,000	75,000
1810	1,375,000	178,000
1820	1,775,000	335,000
1830	2,325,000	732,000
1840	2,875,000	1,348,000
1850	3,650,000	2,136,000
1860	4,450,000	3,841,000

Discussion:

Where was cotton grown? Why in that region?

How did it effect the economic and free enterprise system in the north, south, and England?

How did this product contribute to the cause of the civil war?

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Tyler Smith Co Texas July 14th 1861

Dear Brother

When Arnold was here a few days ago I told him to tell you I would write you by Col FF Foscue at Ft. Smith But he is now trying to raise a company to go with him and may not leave for several days, so I will try this by mail hoping it will reach you I have nothing new to write you, Arnold can post you, up to a few days back, No news from the seat of War east, we have heard two or three reports about Washington being taken but they all prove false, and the reliable news from there is July 6th they were having occasional skirmishes resulting every time in favour of our men, It is now thought Johnsen was in the right for falling back from Harpers Ferry as he yet has it in his power to repossess himself of it without the danger of being surrounded by the enemy He sent all the machinery for making guns and other equipage of war away from there to Fayetteville N.C. before evacuating the place, and report says he still has a guerisen of 600 men there, Nothing new from Ft Pickens, You are doubtless better posted in regard to movements in Mo. than we are Galveston recently blockaded too I saw today a synopsis of Leincons Message He shows no disposition for peace He will ask for it yet no doubt We are receiving as much respect from Foreign powers as we could expect, Arnold it is confidently believed here we will soon be recognized if we should where will Leincen be? The present crop of cotton being fair to be very heavy which you know will be the greater inducement to Eng. & France to respect us.....

..... In conclusion the love of your affectionate Brother,

W.J. Goodman

Whenever you can drop me a line, sure, ever your brother Wm

I have not been down in that neighborhood since my letter to you by Dr Gray and can give you none of the settlement data.

I have not been down in that neighborhood since my letter to you by Dr Gray and can give you none of the settlement data. Tyler is almost a deserted place. If I were not kept so busy I do not know what I should do. I give Robt Lyon my best wishes, tell him Uncle Ben says his crop is doing finely lately. Brother if I had you here I could talk to you all night. But letter writing is a feeble way of expressing one's feelings. If you find you will likely be stationed long enough any where for me to get a letter to you let me know and I will write promptly. Take care of yourselves & horses. Jim Arnold tells us you all got plenty of good arms, we were rejoiced to hear that we know you know how to use them. Give my kindest regards to your Miss tell her I'll see her. His brother of the F. School Starbelle, spend a couple hours with me at my office yesterday. He is a candidate for legislature. Ed Dexter, Frank Hays, Alarim, Phil of Canton, S. M. Warner, also candidates. Edman for senate, in conclusion, the love of your affectionate Brother W. F. Goodman

Tyler South Co Texas July 17th 1861
Dear Brother

When Amada was here a few days ago I let him to tell you & would write you by Col. F. & Goscutt & St. Smith. But he is now trying to raise a company to go with him and may not leave for several days, so I will try this by mail hoping it will reach you. I have nothing new to write you, Amada came past you, up to a few days back. No news from the seat of war east, we have heard now or the reports about Washington being taken but they all prove false, and the reliable news from there is July 6th they were having occasional skirmishes, resulting every time in favour of our men. It is now thought Johnson was in the right for falling back from Harpers Ferry, as he got his in his power to repossess himself of it, without the danger of being surrounded by the enemy. He sent all the machinery for making guns and other equipage of war, away from there

to Fayetteville, N.C. before evacuating the
place, and report says he still has a garrison
of 600 men there. - Nothing new from
Gen Pickens. - Good and doubtless better
posted in regard to movements in Mo., than
Mr and Galveston, recently blockaded too.
Saw today a Synopsis of Selwings Message
He shows our disposition for peace. He will
ask for it yet - no doubt. - We are receiving
as much respect from Foreign powers as one
could expect, and it is confidently believed
here we will soon be recognized, if we
should. Where will Lincoln be? - The present
crop of Cotton bolls fair to be very heavy, which
you know will be the greater inducement to
Eng. & France to respect us. -

Necessity may soon require me to take
the Sueda & wife. If so I expect to be fined
your company if I have to go to the head of Mo.,
to find it. But as yet there is not necessity
that I should go. Were it not for our aged
Parents - I would be with you - in less than
a month. But I owe them a duty, they have
reared us & taken care of us when we could

not care for ourselves. But they are willing
I should go when necessity calls me. Pa
told me when I was at home last, that if
it got to where his coat was called on he was
determined to buckle on his arms and make
for the field of action, so you see there is no
lack of spirit here when it is needed.
How John what little news I give. He feels
very near to me. Benton says should I go
he is determined to go with me. - John
says they say is fine. You never saw
finer crops than we have this year.
My horses do not look like they did when
you left - I have read them almost down
they are poor, and I feel the word of a
ruler all night last night. - No fatal cases
have yet fallen to my part. - Hear from
Pa yesterday all well there and at Uncle Sillys.
He is no better satisfied with Texas, interests
standing the fine luxuriant crops around
him. I told him last time I saw him, just
look at the fields now and it was all the
proof I asked, to prove all John Roberts
myself had ever written or told him in S.C.

REVIEW OF CIVIL WAR LETTER

Who wrote this letter and what was the occupation?

What side of the Civil War did the writer support? Provide evidence.

What was the purpose of the letter?

What important details are provided in this letter?

What is the mental state of the writer? (ex: anger, despair, empathy, joy, sympathy)
