

Curriculum Controversies

USHistory.org Unit 22b

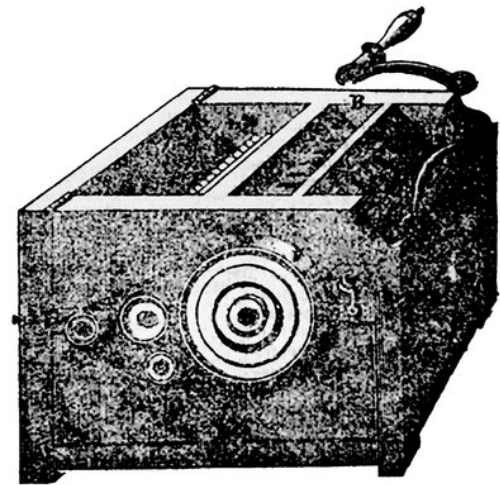
The American Industrial Revolution, concentrated in the northeast, would ultimately prove to be the most significant force in the development of the modern United States. This economic innovation sprung primarily from necessity. New England's agricultural economy was the poorest in the country and that helped to spur experimentation there. Meanwhile, the far more fertile southern states remained fully committed to agriculture as the central source of its wealth, here, too, dramatic changes created a wholly new economy that would have been unrecognizable to late-18th century Americans.

The slave-based TOBACCO ECONOMY that sustained the Chesapeake region was in deep crisis in the late-18th century and some Virginia leaders even talked about ending slavery. But technological innovations to process cotton soon gave new life to slavery, which would flourish in the new nation as never before.

ELI WHITNEY was among the first to develop a COTTON GIN (short for "engine") that separated seeds from short-staple cotton. This hardier cotton variety thrived in the new land of the Old Southwest, and could now be processed far more efficiently than had been possible by hand. Indeed, the gin increased by fifty times what a single person could process in a day. This new cotton production, in turn, provided the raw material for the booming industrial textile mills of the American northeast and Great Britain. Technological innovation and geographic expansion made the south the world's largest producer and exporter of cotton in the 19th century.

This economic triumph, however, was accompanied by an immeasurable human tragedy. By 1820 all of the northern states had outlawed slavery, but the rise of cotton made the enormous profits of the slave system irresistible to most white southerners. Distinctive northern and southern sections of the United States were emerging with the former more

ALT Text: Black and white illustration of a cotton gin



Caption: From the Library of Congress. Wood-engraving illustration of a cotton gin, Harper's Weekly, 1859.

The Destructive Impact of the Cotton Gin

Excerpt from "A Brief History of Slavery" by Mary Elliott and Jazmine Hughes

The national dialogue surrounding slavery and freedom continued as the demand for enslaved laborers increased. In 1794, Eli Whitney patented the cotton gin, which made it possible to clean cotton faster and get products to the market more quickly. Cotton was king, as the saying went, and the country became a global economic force. But the land for cultivating it was eventually exhausted, and the nation would have to expand to keep up with consumer demand. In 1803, Thomas Jefferson struck a deal with Napoleon Bonaparte, the Louisiana Purchase: In exchange for \$15 million, the United States gained almost 830,000 square miles of land, doubling the size of the country and expanding America's empire of slavery and cotton. Soon after this deal, the United States abolished the international slave trade, creating a labor shortage.

<p>urban and industrial and the latter more agricultural, but the new economies of each section were deeply intertwined. Not only did southern cotton feed northern textile mills, but northern insurers and transporters played a major part in the growth of the modern slave economy of the cotton south.</p>	<p>Under these circumstances, the domestic slave trade increased as an estimated one million enslaved people were sent to the Deep South to work in cotton, sugar and rice fields.</p>
<p>USHistory.org 5b Indentured Servitude</p> <p>The growth of tobacco, rice, and indigo and the plantation economy created a tremendous need for labor in Southern English America. Without the aid of modern machinery, human sweat and blood was necessary for the planting, cultivation, and harvesting of these cash crops. While slaves existed in the English colonies throughout the 1600s, indentured servitude was the method of choice employed by many planters before the 1680s. This system provided incentives for both the master and servant to increase the working population of the Chesapeake colonies.</p> <p>Virginia and Maryland operated under what was known as the "HEADRIGHT SYSTEM." The leaders of each colony knew that labor was essential for economic survival, so they provided incentives for planters to import workers. For each laborer brought across the Atlantic, the master was rewarded with 50 acres of land. This system was used by wealthy plantation aristocrats to increase their land holdings dramatically. In addition, of course, they received the services of the workers for the duration of the indenture.</p> <p>This system seemed to benefit the servant as well. Each INDENTURED SERVANT would have their fare across the Atlantic paid in full by their master. A contract was written that stipulated the length of service — typically five years. The servant would be supplied room and board while working in the master's fields. Upon completion of the contract, the servant would receive "freedom dues," a pre-arranged termination bonus. This might include land, money, a gun, clothes or food. On the surface it seemed like a terrific way for the luckless English poor to make their way to prosperity in a new land. Beneath the surface, this was not often the case.</p>	<p>Excerpt from “A Brief History of Slavery” by Mary Elliott and Jazmine Hughes. From the 1619 Project.</p> <p>Sometime in 1619, a Portuguese slave ship, the São João Bautista, traveled across the Atlantic Ocean with a hull filled with human cargo: captive Africans from Angola, in southwestern Africa. The men, women and children, most likely from the kingdoms of Ndongo and Kongo, endured the horrific journey, bound for a life of enslavement in Mexico. Almost half the captives had died by the time the ship was seized by two English pirate ships; the remaining Africans were taken to Point Comfort, a port near Jamestown, the capital of the English colony of Virginia, which the Virginia Company of London had established 12 years earlier. The colonist John Rolfe wrote to Sir Edwin Sandys, of the Virginia Company, that in August 1619, a “Dutch man of war” arrived in the colony and “broughtnot anything but 20 and odd Negroes, which the governor and cape merchant bought for victuals.” The Africans were most likely put to work in the tobacco fields that had recently been established in the area.</p> <p>Forced labor was not uncommon —Africans and Europeans had been trading goods and people across the Mediterranean for centuries —but enslavement had not been based on race. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, which began as early as the 15th century, introduced a system of slavery that was commercialized, racialized and inherited. Enslaved people were seen not as people at all but as commodities to be bought, sold and exploited. Though people of African descent —free and enslaved —were present in North America as early as the 1500s, the sale of the “20 and odd” African people set the course for what would become slavery in the United States</p>

From USHistory.org 10G “The Declaration of Independence”

The moment had finally come. Far too much bad blood existed between the colonial leaders and the crown to consider a return to the past. More and more colonists felt deprived by the British not only of their money and their civil liberties, but their lives as well. Bloodshed had begun over a year ago and there seemed little chance of a ceasefire. The radical wing of the Continental Congress was gaining strength with each passing day. It was time for a formal break with mother England. It was time to declare independence.

On June 7, 1776, RICHARD HENRY LEE introduced a resolution to the Congress that declared the thirteen colonies "free and independent states." Congress did not act on the resolution immediately. A vote was set for early July. In the meantime it seemed appropriate that some sort of explanation was in order for such a bold act. A subcommittee of five, including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and THOMAS JEFFERSON, was selected to choose the careful wording. Such a document must be persuasive to a great many parties. Americans would read this and join the patriot cause. Sympathetic Britons would read this and urge royal restraint. Foreign powers would read this and aid the colonial militia. They might, that is, if the text were convincing. The five agreed that Jefferson was the most talented writer. They would advise on his prose.

The declaration is divided into three main parts. The first was a simple statement of intent. Jefferson's words echo down through the decades of American life until the present day. Phrases like "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL," "unalienable rights," and "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" have bounced from the lips of Americans in grammar school and retirement. All are contained in the first section that outlines the basic principles of the enlightened leaders. The next section is a list of grievances; that is, why the colonies deemed independence appropriate. King George was guilty of "repeated injuries" that intended to establish "ABSOLUTE TYRANNY" in North America. He has "plundered our seas, burned our towns, and

From “A Brief History of Slavery” by Mary Elliott and Jazmine Hughes. From the 1619 Project.

After the Revolutionary War, Thomas Jefferson and other politicians —both slaveholding and not —wrote the documents that defined the new nation. In the initial draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson condemned King George III of Britain for engaging in the slave trade and ignoring pleas to end it, and for calling upon the enslaved to rise up and fight on behalf of the British against the colonists. This language was excised from the final document, however, and all references to slavery were removed, in stunning contrast to the document’s opening statement on the equality of men. Jefferson was a lifelong enslaver. He inherited enslaved black people; he fathered enslaved black children; and he relied on enslaved black people for his livelihood and comfort. He openly speculated that black people were inferior to white people and continually advocated for their removal from the country. In 1791, Benjamin Banneker, a free black mathematician, scientist, astronomer and surveyor, argued against this mind-set when he wrote to Jefferson, then secretary of state, urging him to correct his “narrow prejudices” and to “eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions, which so generally prevails with respect to us.” Banneker also condemned Jefferson’s slaveholding in his letter and included a manuscript of his almanac, which would be printed the following year. Jefferson was unconvinced of the intelligence of African-Americans, and in his swift reply only noted that he welcomed “such proofs as you exhibit” of black people with “talents equal to those of the other colors of men

destroyed the lives of our people." It was difficult for Americans to argue his points. The concluding paragraph officially dissolves ties with Britain. It also shows modern readers the courage taken by each delegate who would sign. They were now officially guilty of treason and would hang in the gallows if taken before a royal court. Thus, they would "pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Debate in the Congress followed. Jefferson watched painfully as the other delegates tweaked his prose. Jefferson had wanted to include a passage blaming the king for the slave trade, for example, but the southern delegates insisted upon its removal.