

# THE COTTON KINGDOM

“WANTED,” began an advertisement in a southern newspaper. “Land in the climate of Middle Georgia on rivers flowing smoothly. . . under laws favorable to the holding of Negroes in bondage.” That ad summed up the needs of many southern farmers—fertile soil, a good water supply, a mild climate, and conditions that favored slavery.

In colonial times, parts of the South developed a plantation economy. Landowners raised cash crops—such as tobacco, rice, and sugar cane—on large estates. Because those crops require almost year-round care, planters needed many workers. To meet that need, they imported slaves—men and women forcibly brought from Africa.

## ***TOBACCO, RICE, AND SUGAR CANE***

In 1612, John Rolfe introduced tobacco to the early settlers in Virginia. Tobacco helped the colony to survive and prosper. However, tobacco growing quickly exhausts the soil by drawing out nitrogen and other nutrients. As a result, planters had to keep moving to find new land on which to grow tobacco.

In South Carolina, settlers found that the soil and climate were favorable for growing rice. By the late 1600’s, rice plantations were springing up along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia and inland from Charleston. Sugar cane, too, flourished in that region. Both crops grow best in regions that have hot summer temperatures and plenty of moisture.

Tobacco, rice, and sugar cane brought prosperity to some—though certainly not all planters. However, by the late 1700’s, weak demand caused the prices for these crops to fall. Planters did not have to look far for another, more profitable crop.

The new source of wealth was cotton. In the late 1700’s and early 1800’s, two events triggered a booming demand for cotton. First,

The Industrial Revolution in Britain and New England began in the textile mills. As these mills turned to machines to produce cloth, the demand for raw cotton soared.

Second, the invention of the cotton gin solved the long-standing problem of removing seeds from the lint (the cotton itself). With Eli Whitney’s gin (engine), slaves could clean 50 pounds of cotton in a day instead of just a pound by hand. The result was higher cotton production to meet the rising demand.

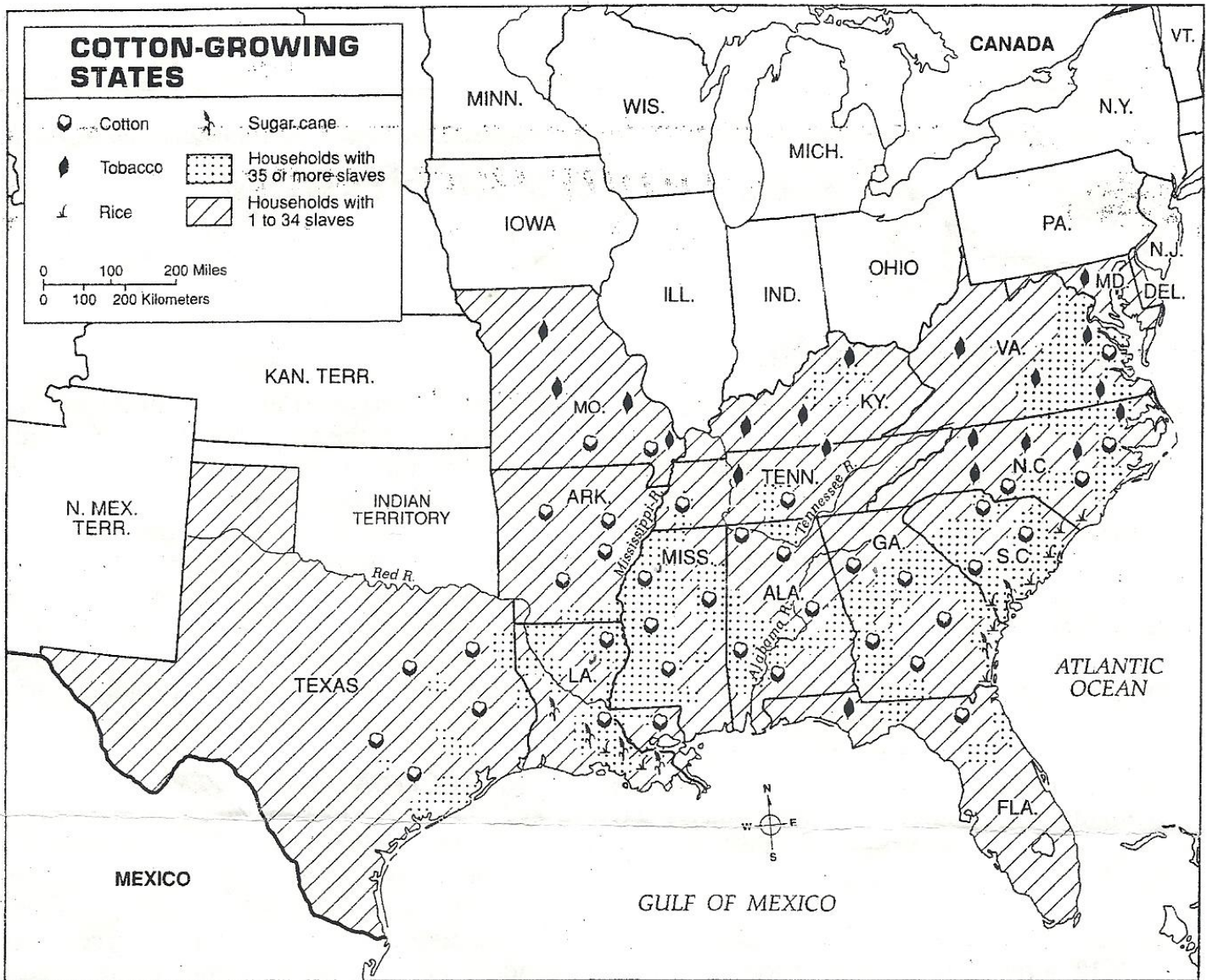
## ***“KING COTTON” MOVES WEST***

The cotton boom spurred farmers from the Southeast to settle lands in the West. They built plantations in Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, where conditions were well suited to cotton. As with tobacco, rice, and sugar cane, the basic needs were fertile soil, moisture, and mild temperatures.

The best lands lay along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. When these rivers flooded each year, they deposited silt that renewed the soil. This region also had a favorable climate. Cotton requires a long growing season. It takes at least 200 frost-free days for cotton seeds to develop into full-grown plants.

The region attracted cotton growers for another reason. It lay south of the Missouri Compromise line, so slavery was legal. Cotton growing was labor-intensive, requiring many workers. In February and March, slaves plowed the land and planted the cotton. They continued working in the fields until the cotton was picked in the late summer. Once picked, cotton was ginned, or cleaned, baled, and packed for shipping.

The rising demand for cotton led to an increased need for slaves. So slavery, which had been declining since the time of the American Revolution, revived. The price of slaves rose, too.



### A. FIVE THEMES OF GEOGRAPHY

- 1. Location** (a) Name 3 of the southern states where cotton was a major crop. (b) Name the 3 states where the population of black slaves was the highest.
- 2. Place** Why were western Mississippi and eastern Arkansas good places for growing cotton?
- 3. Interaction** Give two reasons why the demand for cotton increased in the early 1800s.
- 4. Movement** Why did farmers migrate from Virginia and other southeastern states to states in the deep South such as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana?
- 5. Region** Discuss three reasons why the South was a good region for cotton growers.

### B. CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Analyzing Information** How did crop production influence the slave population?
- 2. Cause and Effect** How did economic interests tie northerners to the slaveholding system of the South?