







The Cotton Gin & Slavery

Overview:









Students will learn how Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin caused a massive growth in the production of cotton in the American South and subsequently led to the expansion of slavery.

Objectives:


At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

-  **Identify** the different parts of a cotton plant.
-  **Identify** where cotton is grown in the U.S. today.
-  **Explain** why more labor was needed after the invention of the cotton gin.
-  **Describe** the conditions under which slaves worked in the cotton fields.







Vocabulary:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  bracts |  slavery |
|  bolls |  industrial revolution |
|  lint |  mass production |
|  cotton gin | |
|  plantation | |



Preparation:

-  Prior to the lesson, discuss with students, colleagues, and parents that this lesson can be sensitive as a result of the lasting traumatic effects of slavery in our country. This lesson is intended to give students an overview of the “unintended consequences” of the invention of the cotton gin, not to have students simulate picking cotton in the plantations of the Southern U.S.



Materials:

-  A live cotton plant
-  Cotton bolls with embedded seeds (If you cannot grow cotton in the garden, you can get them from the California Cotton Grower's Association.)
-  Visual Aid: “The Stages of Cotton Formation”
-  Photos of a cotton gin
-  USDA Background on Cotton
-  Digital History: “How Cotton Was Raised on a Louisiana Plantation” by Solomon Northrup

On the Board:

-  Vocabulary
-  Student Reflection Questions

Suggested Snack:

-  Collard Greens: <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/51803/kickin-collard-greens/>
-  Corn Bread: <http://www.food.com/recipe/the-best-moist-sweet-cornbread-248806>

Learning Activities:

1. Warm-Up: Observing a Live Cotton Plant (5 min.)
 - A. If possible, take students into the garden to view a live cotton plant.
 - B. Have students identify the different parts of the plant: stem, leaf, flower, bracts, bolls, and seeds.
 - C. Define *bract*: the outer shell that opens to reveal the boll.
 - D. Define *boll*: the round fluffy clumps where cotton lint is located.

2. Activity: Cotton Ball Game (15 min.)
 - A. Demonstrate how to separate a cotton seed from the cotton lint.
 - B. Divide the class into small groups.
 - C. Give each group a small pile of cotton lint and instruct them to separate the seeds from the lint. Give them 5-10 minutes to complete the task. Whichever group finishes first wins.
 - D. Bring the class back together and ask students if they thought it was easy or difficult.
 - E. Discuss the cotton industry in the 1700s and 1800s.
 - Before Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793, slaves had to separate the seeds from the lint by hand, like the students just did, sometimes for up to 12 hours a day.
 - Show students a picture of the cotton gin and explain that whole pieces of cotton were put into the machine, the gears were turned, and the seeds were mechanically separated from the lint.
 - Ask students if they think this meant that slaves had to do less work.
 - Tell students that this invention led to the expansion of the cotton industry. Since seeds could be separated faster, this meant that slaves had to plant more fields with the crop and pick the cotton faster. Consequently, there was a need for more slaves to do this work.

3. Classroom Activity and Discussion (20 min.)
 - A. Distribute the Handout: "Working in the Cotton Fields."
 - Have a student read aloud the slave's description of working on a cotton plantation in Louisiana in the 1840s.
 - B. Lead a discussion about the excerpt. Ask students:
 - Do you think you could do this for 8-12 hours a day, like slaves were forced to do?
 - Why was working in the cotton fields a "no-win" situation for slaves?
 - What was the "gin-house?"
 - C. Discuss the impact of the cotton gin. Ask students:
 - to recall what they learned in the previous lesson about manufacturing vs. agriculture.
 - How did this invention impact the country?

- Textiles were a major industry in the North which relied heavily on the cotton grown in the South.
 - The cotton gin allowed textiles to be mass produced for the first time.
 - Unfortunately, this also produced a greater need for slaves.
 - The textile manufacturing plant owners could also export the products their workers were making for high prices which led to economic growth.
 - Explain to students that cotton is still a major industry in the United States, including California's San Joaquin Valley. (See the USDA handout.)
4. Snack: Collard greens and corn bread. Tell students this was a common meal for slaves in the South, that often went along with Hoppin' John (their snack from the lesson: "Food as Culture: Black-Eyed Peas and African-American Culture"). (5 min.)
5. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

Student Reflection Questions:

1. Describe the challenges of a slave working in a cotton field. Write a simulated diary entry after a long day working in the field.

Assessment Questions:

1. The invention of the cotton gin meant that:
 - A. Less slave labor was needed as the cotton gin did most of the work.
 - B. More slave labor was needed as there was now a greater demand for cotton.**
2. What was the cotton gin?
 - A. A machine that picked cotton from the fields.
 - B. A machine that separated the cotton seeds from the lint.**
 - C. A machine that spun the cotton into thread to make textiles.

Standards:

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

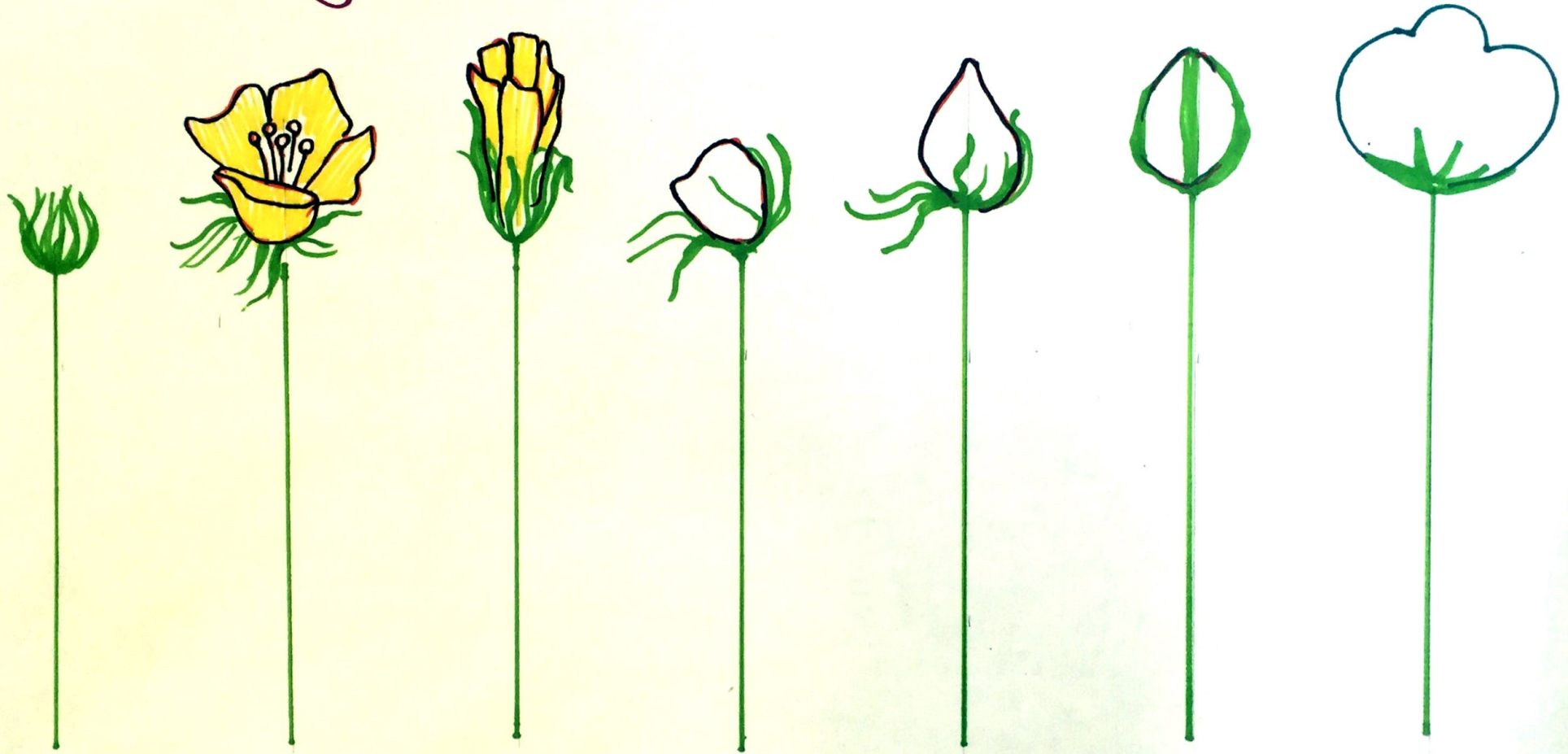
Acknowledgements:

How Cotton Was Raised on a Louisiana Plantation. Digital History.

www.digitalhistory.uh.edu

USDA Economic Research Service: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/cotton-wool/background/>

The Stages of COTTON Formation



①

Bud

②

Bloom

③

Bloom
Over

④

Boll
Formation

⑤

Boll
Formation

⑥

Capsule
Almost
Mature

⑦

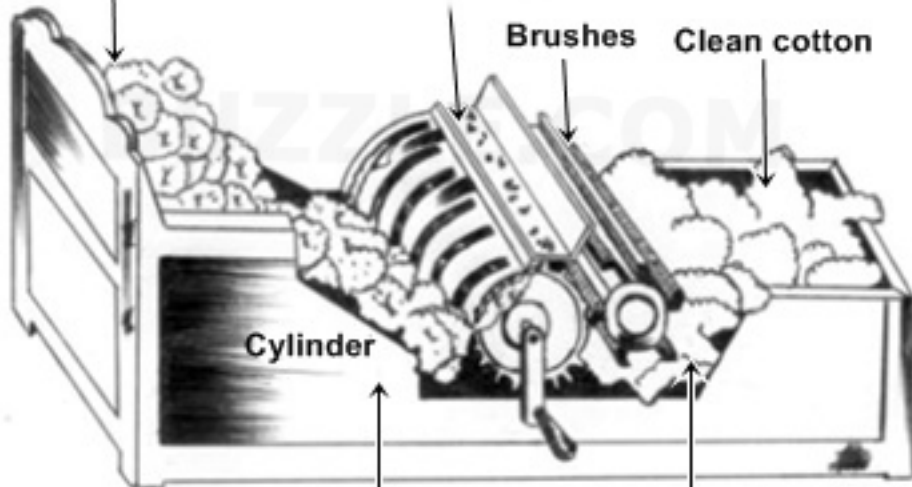
Capsule
Fully
Mature &
Opened

Cotton bolls with seeds

Seeds

Brushes

Clean cotton



Cylinder

Container for cotton bolls

Container for clean cotton

© Buzzle.com



Background

The U.S. cotton industry generates about 200,000 jobs among the various sectors from farm to textile mill and accounts for more than \$25 billion in products and services annually. Cotton is produced in 17 southern States from Virginia to California. Major concentrations include areas of:

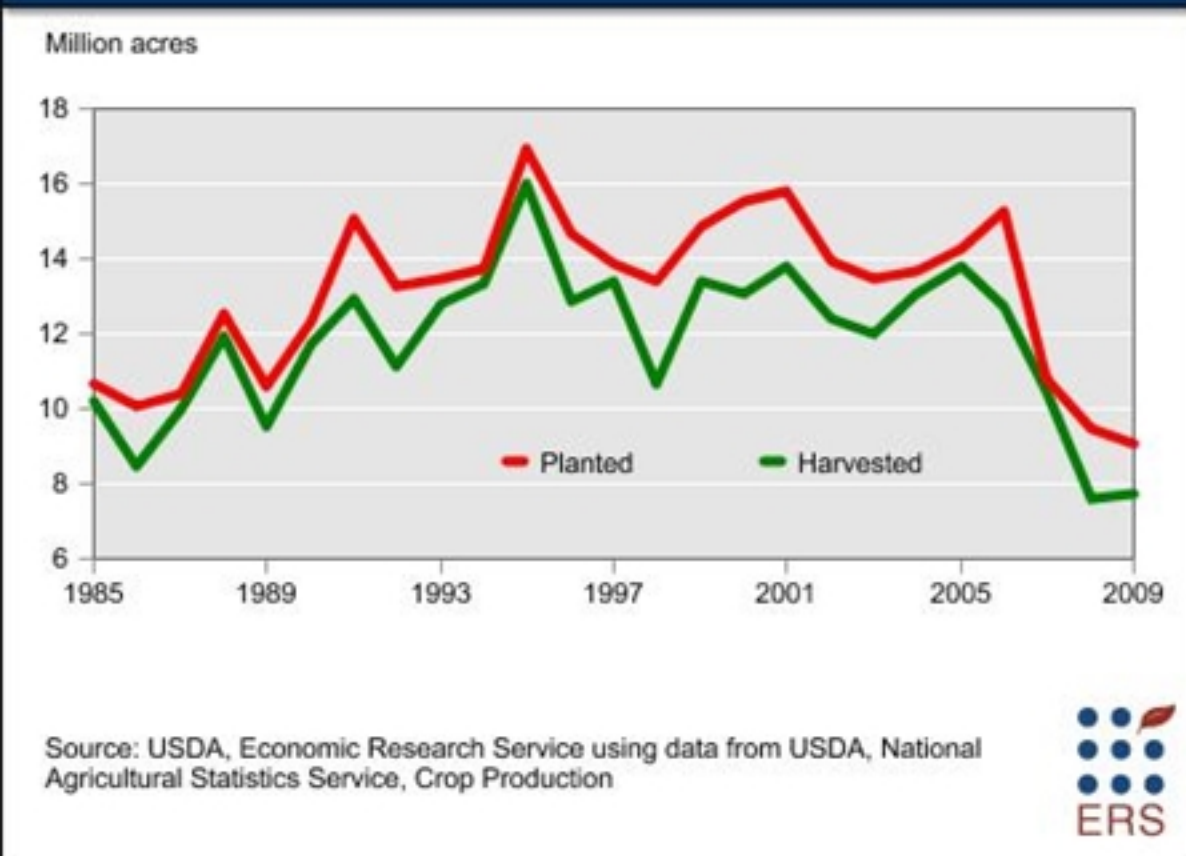
- the Texas High and Rolling Plains;
- the Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana Delta;
- Southern Georgia; and
- California's San Joaquin Valley.

U.S. cotton is grown as an annual from seed planted each year, although cotton can be grown as a perennial in tropical climates. Given the vast differences across the U.S. production area, the [cotton growing season](#) varies dramatically, as typical planting occurs between March and June and typical harvesting occurs between August and December.

The predominant type of cotton grown in the United States is American Upland (*Gossypium hirsutum*). The upland type, which usually has a staple length of 1 to 1 1/4 inches, accounts for about 97 percent of the annual U.S. cotton crop. Upland cotton is grown throughout the U.S. Cotton Belt, as well as in most major cotton-producing countries. The balance of U.S.-grown cotton is American Pima or extra-long staple (ELS) (*Gossypium barbadense*). ELS cotton, which has a staple length of 1 1/2 inches or longer, is produced predominantly in California, where it is particularly well adapted to environmental conditions. ELS cotton is also grown in the arid regions of southwest Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The markets for ELS cotton are mainly high-value products, such as sewing thread and expensive apparel, although it is also used in home items, such as bath towels and rugs.

Cotton acreage in the United States rose slightly during the first half of the 2000s, which continued a multi-decade trend. In the 1970s and 1980s, area planted to cotton averaged about 12 million acres. Area rose to about 14 million acres in the 1990s and averaged over 14.5 million acres during the first half of the 2000s. Since 2006, however, U.S. cotton planted area has been considerably lower as relative prices have favored the planting of alternative crops, such as corn and soybeans. All regions of the Cotton Belt have experienced significant declines as compared with the first half of the 2000s.

U.S. cotton acreage



[Download larger size chart \(480 pixels by 380, 96 dpi\)](#)

According to the Census of Agriculture, U.S. cotton farms numbered 18,605 in 2007, down from 24,805 in 2002. While the number has fallen, cotton acreage per farm has risen, averaging 564 acres per farm in 2007 compared with 502 acres in 2002. The percentage of large cotton farms (over 1,000 acres) has continued to increase while the share of small cotton farms (under 100 acres) declines.

Similar to area, cotton production in the United States during the first half of the 2000s continued a rising trend, paralleling advances in technology (seed varieties, fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery) and production practices (reduced tillage, irrigation, crop rotations, and pest management systems). The impact of these changes has been particularly evident, with yields and production reaching new highs. While U.S. cotton production decreased considerably following the area reductions of the late 2000s, consistently higher yields helped limit the effect of these acreage declines.

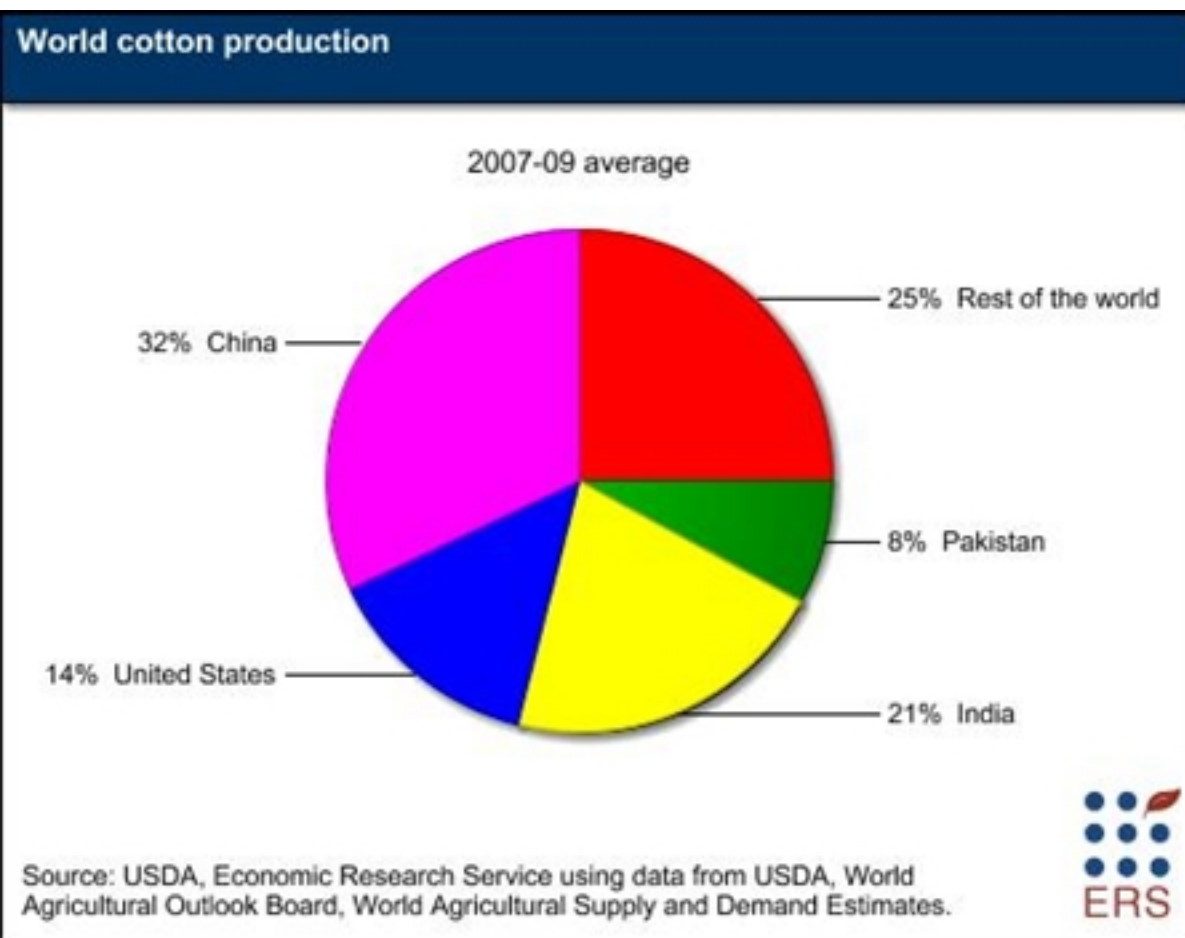
Consumption of cotton by U.S. textile mills peaked in 1997. Since then, U.S. mill use of cotton has plummeted, dropping about 50 percent by 2005 and nearly 70 percent by 2009. While the end of the Multifiber Arrangement's (MFA) quotas in 2005 was a factor, much of the decline in U.S. textile production occurred before then. See this publication for more details about the MFA:

[The Forces Shaping World Cotton Consumption After the Multifiber Arrangement](#)

Capital investment by global textile suppliers near the turn of the century provided increased concentration and market share, accelerating a long-standing trend of textile production moving to developing countries. Despite the decline of U.S. textile production, U.S. consumer demand for cotton products remains strong, but imported clothing now accounts for most purchases by U.S. consumers. (See [U.S. Textile and Apparel Industries and Rural America](#) for more information about the impact of changes in textile trade on the U.S. textile industry from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.)

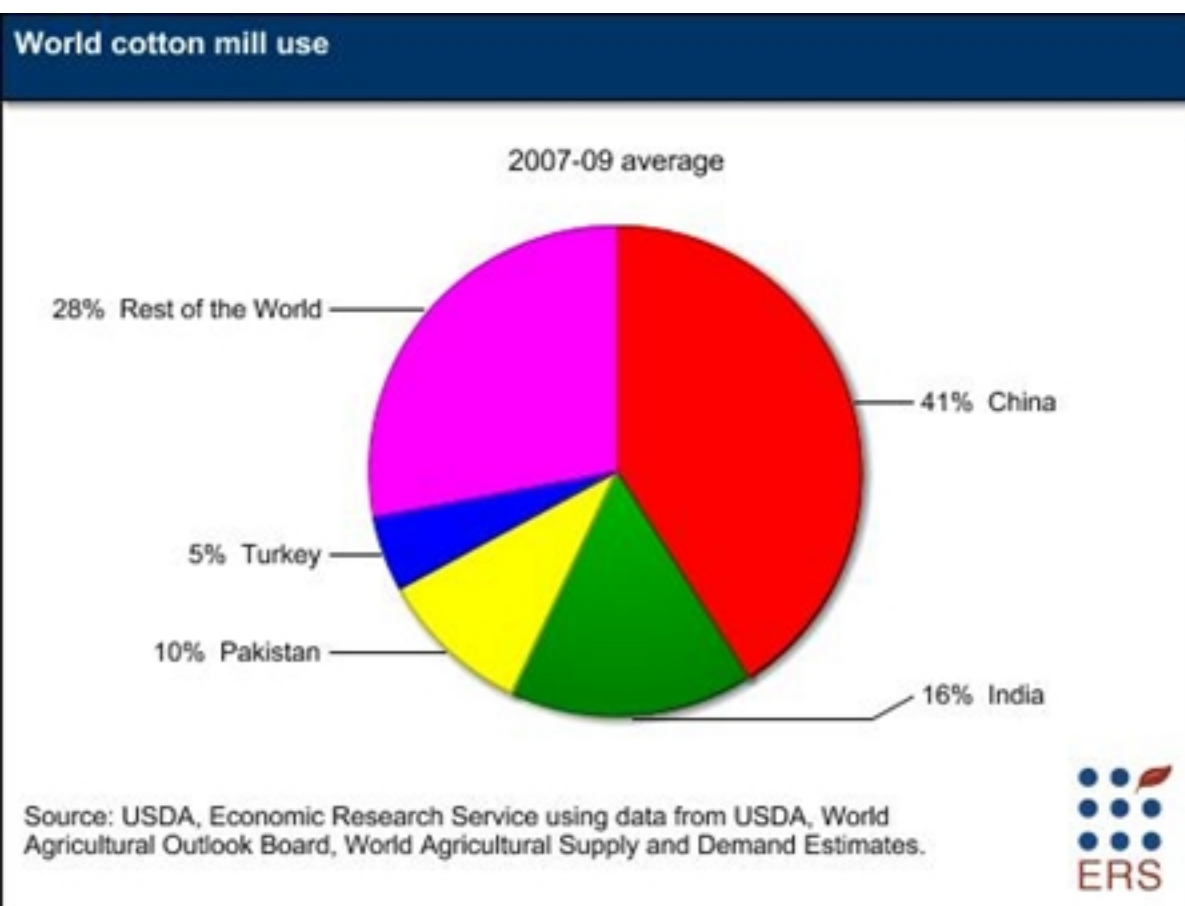
The world's four largest cotton-producing countries are China, India, the United States, and Pakistan, which together account for nearly 75 percent of world production. Other major producers include Brazil, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. While cotton is generally a Northern Hemisphere crop, about 8 percent of the world's output comes from south of the equator (primarily Brazil and Australia) and is harvested during the Northern Hemisphere's spring.

Many of the leading cotton producers are also leading mill users of raw cotton. The top three consumers are China, India, and Pakistan, which together account for two-thirds of world consumption. Turkey and Brazil are the fourth and fifth largest mill users of cotton, bumping the United States to sixth place among consuming nations.



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Trade is particularly important for cotton. About 30 percent of the world's consumption of cotton fiber crosses international borders before processing, a larger share than for wheat, corn, soybeans, or rice. Through trade in yarn, fabric, and clothing, much of the world's cotton again crosses international borders at least once more before reaching the final consumer.



[Download larger size chart \(503 pixels by 380, 96 dpi\)](#)

The cotton industry continues to face many of the supply and demand concerns confronting other field crops. However, since cotton is used primarily in manufactured products, such as clothing and home furnishings, the industry faces additional challenges associated with the economic well-being of downstream manufacturing industries, as well as the economic well-being of the final consumer.

Related Reports

[Cotton and Wool Outlook: March 2017](#) [Cotton and Wool Outlook Tables: February 2017](#) [Cotton and Wool Outlook Tables: January 2017](#) [Cotton and Wool Outlook: December 2016](#) [Federal Crop Insurance Options for Upland Cotton Farmers and Their Revenue Effects](#) [See all](#)

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Related Data

[Cotton, Wool, and Textile Data](#) [Agricultural Baseline Database International Baseline Data](#) [Adoption of Genetically Engineered Crops in the U.S.](#) [Commodity Costs and Returns](#) [See all](#)

Digital History

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How Cotton Was Raised on a Louisiana Plantation

Digital History ID 483

Author: Solomon Northrup

Date: 1853

Annotation: Solomon Northrup was a free black who was kidnapped in New York and sold into slavery for twelve years. He was finally returned to freedom through the efforts of New York's governor. In the following selection he describes how cotton was raised on his Louisiana plantation.

Document: The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night. They do not dare to stop even at dinner time, nor return to the quarters, however late it be, until the order to halt is given by the driver.

The day's work over in the field, the baskets are "toted," or in other words, carried to the gin-house, where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be - no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest - a slave never approaches the gin-house with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight - if he has not performed the full task appointed him, he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly. So, whether he has too little or too much, his approach to the gin-house is always with fear and trembling. Most frequently they have too little, and therefore it is they are not anxious to leave the field. After weighing, follow the whippings; and then the baskets are carried to the cotton house, and their contents stored away like hay, all hands being sent in to tramp it down. If the cotton is not dry, instead of taking it to the gin-house at once, it is laid upon platforms, two feet high, and some three times as wide, covered with boards or plank, with narrow walks running between them.

This done, the labor of the day is not yet ended, by any means. Each one must then attend to his respective chores. One feeds the mules, another the swine - another cuts the wood, and so forth; besides, the packing is all done by candle light. Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil. Then a fire must be kindled in the cabin, the corn ground in the small hand-mill, and supper, and dinner for the next day in the field, prepared. All that is allowed them is corn and bacon, which is given out at the corncrib and smoke-house every Sunday morning. Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal. That is all - no tea, coffee, sugar, and with the exception of a very scanty sprinkling now and then, no salt....

An hour before day light the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfast, fill a gourd with water, in another deposit their dinner of cold bacon and corn cake, and hurry to the field again. It is an offense invariably followed by a flogging, to be found at the quarters after daybreak. Then the fears and labors of another day begin; and until its close there is no such thing as rest....

In the month of January, generally, the fourth and last picking is completed. Then commences the harvesting of corn....Ploughing, planting, picking cotton, gathering the corn, and pulling and burning stalks, occupies the whole of the four seasons of the year. Drawing and cutting wood, pressing cotton fattening and killing hogs are but incidental labors.

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