

How did the cotton economy shape the south's environment and labor system

[History](#)



How did the cotton economy shape the South's environment and labor system? This is a History and Political Science paper that responds to the question: How did the cotton economy shape the South's environment and labor system? This paper further discusses the ways slaves resist their oppression and the ways their culture and communities sustain them. This paper also answers the following questions: Why did the Americans provoke the war with Mexico? How did Indians affect the U. S.-Mexican war? Who were the winners and losers in the California gold rush? How did the new railroad increase social tensions in the United States in 1850s? How did the Lecompton Constitution and the Lincoln-Douglas debates affect the debate over slavery in the territories? Why did Lincoln's election in 1860 cause the South to secede? Scholarly sources which were researched online were used in providing for the answers.

Keywords: cotton economy, antebellum South, U. S.-Mexican war, California gold rush

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a. The antebellum South was mainly agricultural with cotton as their main product and with the unprecedented growth of the cotton economy during that period, slave labor became the major capital investment. South remained agricultural and produced on site goods and services. It remained a largely closed society and only a few towns or villages emerged. (" The Cotton Economy in the South." American Eras. 1997).

Slaves were only regarded as properties by their owners and were often maltreated and oppressed. Though a few had the courage to fight back, their

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punishments were much more severe; they were whipped, beaten, drowned or hanged. Others resisted by slowing down in their work or feigning illness or breaking their tools. Others sabotaged their production like setting fire on the crops, and some resorted to theft of food, tobacco, liquor, and money from their slave masters.

In the 1850s, slaves in plantations dwelt in quarters made up of crudely-made cabins. They lived together within the same homestead and this made the black communities flourish. Within these slave communities, they were able to retain their African culture with their folk tales, religion and spirituality, music and dance, and language, and they had their own families. These made their lives as slaves bearable.

b. The Americans believed they had a “ manifest destiny” to expand across the Pacific Ocean. After the election of James K. Polk in 1844, he at once initiated the annexation of Texas and he also eyed California and New Mexico.

The Indians made it more difficult for the Americans in their war against Mexico. As U. S. was having war with Mexico, they were also having a cultural war against the Indians who were considered as hindrance in the expansion of white population.

The California Gold Rush had very little positive outcome. The massive emigration from as far back as China dramatically increased California’s population and incorporated it as the 31st State. Roads, churches, schools and other towns were built throughout the region. A few lucky “ forty-niners” acquired massive wealth from the gold they were able to find. The many losers in the California Gold Rush were the many gold seekers who either

died of sickness or accidents while en route to California or from the chaos brought about by the lawlessness of the land. Many were not able to strike it rich and ended up as mere workers. The Native Americans who depended on hunting for their food found themselves starving and their land forcibly taken away from them. A few managed to fight back, but the miners retaliated and massacred Indian villages. This depleted the population of Native Americans from about 150, 000 in 1845 to as low as 30, 000 by 1870.

c. The new railroads began to industrialize the South which added to the social tensions beginning to brew between the rich plantation owners and professional groups and the poor small farmer groups.

The Lecompton Constitution in 1857 and the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858 which were both focused on slavery made the people think more about the plight of the slaves and their social impact. These further divided the pro-slave and the anti-slave territories.

The leaders of the South, who were understandably pro-slavery, seceded because they very well knew that Lincoln was an anti-slavery advocate and his presidential election meant eventual emancipation and social equality for their black population (Niven, 1991).

References

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