An Era of Reform

Overview and Objectives

Overview

Students examine the reform movements of the mid-1800s to evaluate to what extent they improved life for Americans. In a Response Group activity, they debate the extent to which grievances from the Declaration of Sentiments have been redressed today.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- analyze how transcendentalism contributed to the spirit of reform.
- describe the conditions in prisons, in schools, for slaves, and for women in the mid-1800s, and identify the reform movements that resulted.
- evaluate how well reform movements improved life for Americans.
- explain the contributions of such reformers as Horace Mann, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglas, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
- debate the degree to which the grievances from the Declaration of Sentiments have been redressed today.

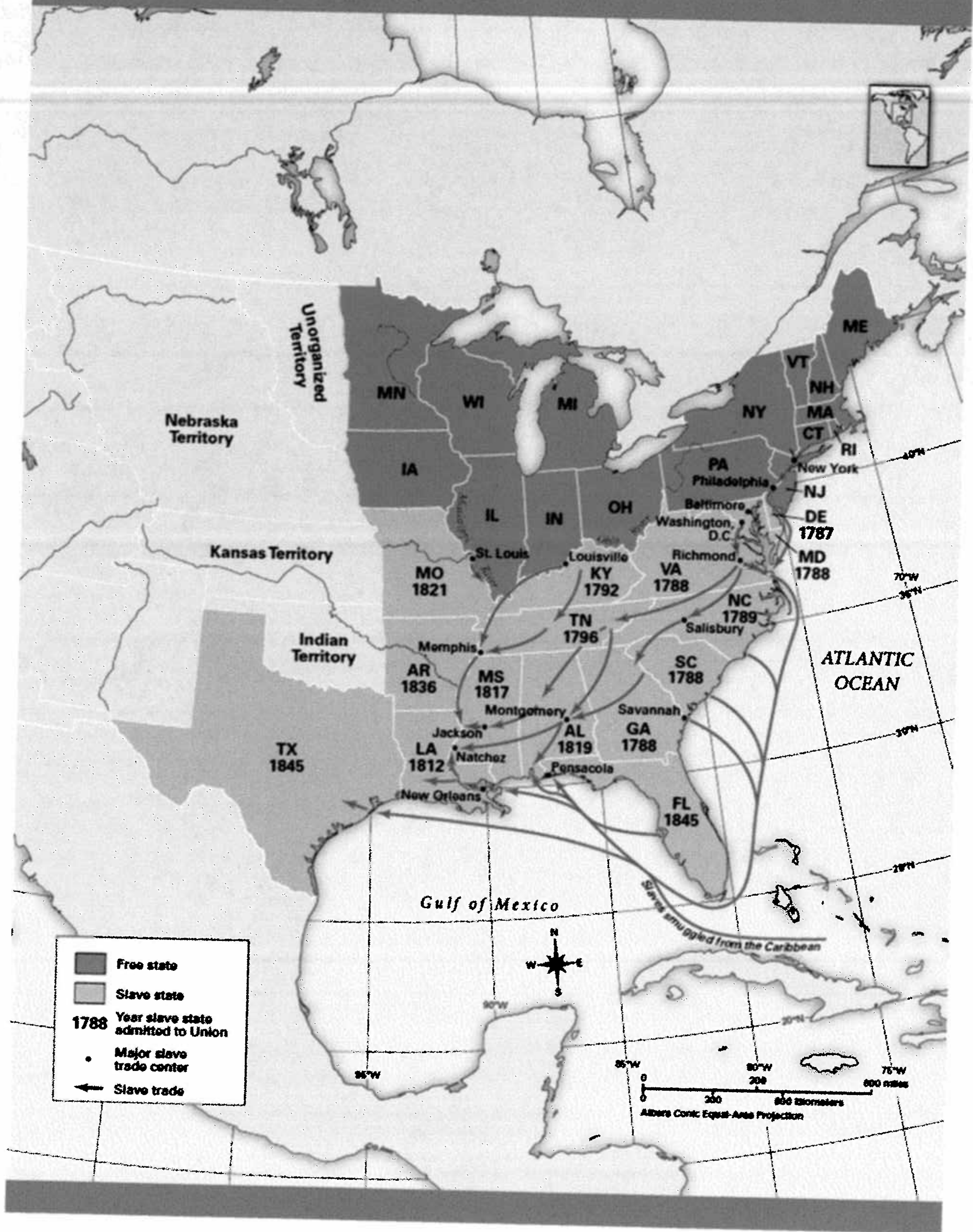
Language Arts

- deliver persuasive presentations.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms reform, Second Great Awakening, transcendentalism, abolitionist, Seneca Falls Convention, Declaration of Sentiments

Academic Vocabulary intuition, conform, individualism, devote


The Slave Trade in the United States, 1808–1865
Unorganized Territory
Nebraska Territory
Kansas Territory
Indian Territory
MN
WI
MI
IA
IL
IN
OH
NY
PA
ME
VT
NH
MA
CT
RI
NJ
DE 1787
MD 1788
MO 1821
KY 1792
VA 1788
NC 1789
TN 1796
SC 1788
GA 1788
AL 1819
MS 1817
AR 1836
LA 1812
TX 1845
FL 1845
St. Louis
Louisville
Richmond
Baltimore
Washington, D.C.
Philadelphia
New York
Salisbury
Memphis
Montgomery
Savannah
Jackson
Natchez
Pensacola
New Orleans
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Gulf of Mexico
Slaves smuggled from the Caribbean
Free state
Slave state
1788 Year slave state admitted to Union
Major slave trade center
Slave trade
Albers Conic Equal-Area Projection

An Era of Reform

To what extent did the reform movements of the mid-1800s improve life for Americans?

Setting the Stage - Americans in the Mid-1800s

In 1787, "in Order to form a more perfect Union, " a group of political leaders wrote the Constitution of the United States. Some 50 years later, however, some people believed that the Union was still far from perfect. Most of them were not political leaders. Instead, they were everyday Americans—men and women, black and white, ministers and teachers.

From the 1830s through the 1850s, these reformers tried to improve American society in many ways. Some of their efforts met with great resistance. One of the most controversial issues was the struggle to end slavery. Many Northerners, as well as many white Southerners, thought slavery was morally wrong. However, the South's economy depended on slave labor. Over time, that dependence grew.

The Constitution banned the importation of slaves starting in 1808. Yet, as white Southerners moved westward, the demand for slave labor increased. This demand was met by the natural growth of slave populations in older parts of the South. Slaveholders in these areas sold slaves to buyers from other regions. The map on the opposite page shows the cities where much of this slave trade took place. It also shows how slavery spread west. The map below shows the distribution of the slave population in 1860.

In this unit, you will learn about the movement to end slavery and about other attempts at reform. You will also learn about Northern and Southern society, including differences in the lives of free African Americans and slaves. Finally, you will learn about the economies of the North and South and why they made the end of slavery so difficult to achieve.

Section 1 - Introduction

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In 1851, a group of people gathered in a church in Ohio to discuss the rights of women. A tall African American woman made her way through the crowd and sat down. Her name was Sojourner Truth. A former slave, she had learned to pay careful attention to white people. Now she listened as whites discussed whether women should have the same rights as men.

Truth heard one speaker after another explain that women didn't need more rights because they weren't smart or strong enough to do much besides raise children. Women, they argued, needed help from men. One man summed it up by saying, "Women are weak."

Truth had heard enough. She rose slowly to her feet and walked to the pulpit. The room grew quiet as everyone waited for her to speak.

"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and have the best place everywhere," she began. "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!"

Her voice rose to a thunderous pitch. "And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head [outdo] me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it— and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman?"

When she finished, people applauded. Some cried. One witness said, "She had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely."

This scrapbook page from the late 1800s contains pictures of women who led various reform movements.

Sojourner Truth represented two of the great reform movements in America in the 1800s: the movement for women's equality and the movement to end slavery. Between about 1820 and 1850, many Americans devoted themselves to such causes as ending slavery, promoting women's rights, and improving education. In this chapter, you will learn to what extent these reform movements improved life for Americans.

Section 2 - The Spirit of Reform

It was fitting that the meeting attended by Sojourner Truth took place in a church. New religious movements played a key role in inspiring thousands of Americans to try to reform society.

The Second Great Awakening A revival of religious feeling swept across the nation from the 1800s to the 1840s. Church leaders called this period the Second Great Awakening. Day after day, people gathered in churches and big white tents to hear messages of hope. Preachers like Charles G. Finney, a leader of the movement, urged Christians to let themselves be "filled with the Spirit of God." Their listeners prayed, shouted, and sang hymns. Sometimes they cried for hours or fell down in frenzies.

Like the Great Awakening during the 1730s and 1740s, this religious revival appealed to people's emotions. But the Second Great Awakening offered something new. In the past, most Christian ministers had said that God had already decided who would be saved. Now many preachers said everyone could gain forgiveness for their sins. Many of them taught that doing good works could help them to be saved.

This optimistic message attracted enthusiastic followers throughout the West and North. It gave men and women alike a reason to work for the improvement of society. Charles Finney's preaching, for example, inspired many people to oppose slavery.

Optimistic Ideas Other optimistic ideas also inspired Americans during this time. In New England, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a former minister, was the central figure in a movement called transcendentalism. Emerson believed that every human being has unlimited potential. But to realize their godlike nature, people have to transcend, or go beyond, purely logical thinking. They can find the answers to life's mysteries only by learning to trust their emotions and intuition.

Transcendentalists added to the spirit of reform by urging people to question society's rules and institutions. Do not conform to others' expectations, they said. If you want to find God—and your own true self—look to nature and the "God within."

In 1854, Henry David Thoreau published Walden; or, Life in the Woods,

Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau captured this new individualism in a famous essay. "If a man does not keep pace with his companions," wrote Thoreau, "perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears."

Thoreau practiced what he preached. In 1845, he went into the woods near Concord, Massachusetts, to live alone and as close to nature as possible. Thoreau spent more than two years in solitude, recording his thoughts in a 6,000-page journal. In 1846, he was jailed overnight for refusing to pay taxes because of his opposition to the government's involvement in the Mexican-American War.

Model Communities While Thoreau tried to find the ideal life in solitude, other transcendentalists tried to create ideal communities. In 1841, George Ripley started a community called Brook Farm near Boston. Residents at Brook Farm tried to live in "brotherly cooperation" instead of competing with each other, as people in the larger society did. They shared the labor of supporting themselves by farming, teaching, and making clothes.

Brook Farm was only one of hundreds of model communities started by reformers in the first half of the 1800s. Most of these experiments lasted only a few years. But they were a powerful expression of the belief that people of good will could create an ideal society.

Section 3 - Prison Reform

Dorothea Dix worked tirelessly to improve conditions for prisoners and the mentally ill.

One day in 1841, a Boston woman named Dorothea Dix agreed to teach Sunday school at a jail. What she witnessed that day changed her life forever.

Dix was horrified to see that many prisoners were bound in chains and locked in cages. Children accused of minor thefts were jailed with adult criminals. Were conditions this bad everywhere?

Dix devoted herself to finding out the answer to her question. She visited hundreds of jails and prisons throughout Massachusetts. She also visited debtors' prisons, or jails for people who owed money. Most of the thousands of Americans in debtors' prisons owed less than 20 dollars. While they were locked up, they could not earn money to repay their debts. As a result, they remained imprisoned for years.

Treatment of the Mentally Ill What shocked Dix most of all was the way mentally ill people were treated. Most were locked in dirty, crowded prison cells. If they misbehaved, they were whipped.

Dix and other reformers believed that the mentally ill needed treatment and care, not punishment. Massachusetts had one private asylum, or hospital for the mentally ill. Only the wealthy could afford to send a family member there. Even so, the asylum was filled to overflowing.

Campaigning for Better Conditions For two years, Dix gathered information about the horrors she had seen. Then she prepared a detailed report for the Massachusetts state legislature. "I come as the advocate of helpless, forgotten, insane . . . men and women," she said. "I proceed . . . to call your attention to the present state of insane persons, confined . . . in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!" Shocked by Dix's report, the lawmakers voted to create public asylums for the mentally ill.

Dix visited prisons in other states as well. After she prepared reports demanding humane treatment for the mentally ill, those states also created special mental hospitals.

Dix continued campaigning for prison reform for the rest of her life. By the time she died in 1887, state governments no longer put debtors in prison. Most states had created special justice systems for children in trouble. Many had outlawed cruel punishments, such as branding people with hot irons. Dix had shown that reformers could lead society to make significant changes.

Section 4 - Education Reform

A second reform movement that won support in the 1800s was the effort to make education available to more children. The man who would become known as "the father of American public schools," Horace Mann, led this movement.

The Need for Public Schools As a boy in Massachusetts in the early 1800s, Horace Mann attended school only ten weeks a year. The rest of the time, he had to work on his family's farm.

Mann was lucky to have even this limited time in school. In Massachusetts, Puritans had established town schools, but few other areas had public schools, or schools paid for by taxes. Wealthy parents sent their children to private schools or hired tutors. On the frontier, 60 children might attend a part-time, one-room school. Their teachers had limited education and received little pay. Most children simply did not go to school at all.

In the cities, some poor children stole, destroyed property, and set fires. Reformers believed that education would help these children escape poverty and become good citizens. Influenced by the need for education in its big cities, New York set up public elementary schools in every town as early as the 1820s.

Meanwhile, in Massachusetts, Mann became the state's supervisor of education. In towns and villages, he spoke out on the need for public schools. "Our means of education," he stated, "are the grand machinery by which the 'raw material' of human nature can be worked up into inventors and discoverers, into skilled artisans and scientific farmers."

Citizens in Massachusetts responded to Mann's message. They voted to pay taxes to build better schools, to provide teachers with higher salaries, and to establish special training schools for teachers.

Prior to the reforms in public education led by Horace Mann, most children did not attend school. ...

An Unfinished Reform By 1850, many states in the North and West used Mann's ideas. Soon most white children, especially boys, attended free public schools.

But states still did not offer public education to everyone. Most high schools and colleges did not admit girls. States as far north as Illinois passed laws to keep African Americans out of public schools. When towns did allow blacks to attend school, most made them go to separate schools that received less money. In the South, few girls and no African Americans could attend public schools.

Education for girls and women did make some progress. In 1837, Oberlin College in Ohio became the first college to admit women as well as men. When states opened the first public universities in the 1860s, most accepted female students.

African Americans, however, had few options. When Prudence Crandall admitted a black student to her girls' school in Connecticut in 1833, white parents took their children out of the school. Crandall responded by opening a school for African American girls. Angry white people threw stones at the school and had Crandall jailed. In 1834, she was forced to close her school.

Horace Mann realized that much more needed to be done to increase educational opportunities for women and African Americans. In 1853, he became the first president of a new college for men and women, Antioch College in Ohio. There, he urged his students to become involved in improving society. "Be ashamed to die," he told them, "until you have won some victory for humanity."

Section 5 - The Movement to End Slavery

In 1835, a poster appeared on walls throughout Washington, D.C. The poster showed two drawings. One drawing, labeled "The Land of the Free," showed the founding fathers reading the Declaration of Independence. The other, labeled "The Home of the Oppressed," showed slaves trudging past the U.S. Capitol building, the home of Congress. The poster posed a challenging question: How could America, the "land of the free," still allow slavery? By the 1830s, growing numbers of people were asking this question. These people were called abolitionists.

William Lloyd Garrison (above left) published a newspaper called The Liberator in the 1830s.

The Struggle Begins Some Americans had opposed slavery even before the American Revolution began. Quakers stopped owning slaves in 1776. By 1792, every state as far south as Virginia had antislavery societies.

Congress passed a law that ended the Atlantic slave trade in 1808. Once it became illegal to import slaves, Northern shipping communities had no more interest in slavery. Northern textile mills, however, wanted the cheap cotton that slave labor in the South provided. Although slavery ended in the North by the early 1800s, many Northerners still accepted slavery.

Abolitionists wanted to end slavery, but they did not always agree about how to do it. Some abolitionists tried to inspire slaves to rise up in revolt. Others wanted to find a peaceful way to end slavery immediately. Still others wanted to give slaveholders time to develop farming methods that didn't rely on slave labor.

From its earliest days, both blacks and whites worked in the abolition movement, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Black activists often kept their distance from their white counterparts. One African American journalist remarked, "As long as we let them think and act for us . . . they will outwardly treat us as men, while in their hearts they still hold us as slaves."

In 1831, a deeply religious white man, William Lloyd Garrison, started a fiery abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator.

Braving the disapproval of many Northerners, Garrison demanded the immediate freeing of all slaves. "I will be as harsh as truth," he wrote. "I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard!" Angry proslavery groups destroyed Garrison's printing press and burned his house.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, was an important leader in the abolitionist movement.

Frederick Douglass Speaks Out One day, Garrison heard an escaped slave, Frederick Douglass, speaking at a meeting of abolitionists. Over six feet tall, Douglass spoke with a voice like thunder. When he described the cruel treatment of enslaved children, people cried. When he made fun of ministers who told slaves to love slavery, people laughed. When he finished, Garrison jumped up and cried, "Shall such a man be held a slave in a Christian land?" The crowd called out, "No! No! No!"

Douglass quickly became a leader in the abolitionist movement. His autobiography, published in 1845, was an instant best seller. A brilliant and independent thinker, Douglass eventually started his own newspaper, North Star. Its motto read, "Right is of no Sex—Truth is of no Color—God is the Father of us all, and we are all Brethren [brothers]."

Women Get Involved Many women were inspired by religious reform movements to become involved in the fight against slavery. Like other abolitionists, they sometimes faced violence. When a young woman named Angelina Grimke spoke against slavery, an anti-abolition mob threw stones at her. When she kept speaking, they burned the building she was speaking in.

Angelina and her sister Sarah had been raised in a South Carolina slaveholding family. After traveling North and becoming Quakers, they saw slavery in a new way. In the 1830s, the two sisters began speaking out about the poverty and pain of slavery. At first, they spoke only to other women, but soon they were addressing large groups of men and women throughout the North. The Grimkes led the way for other women to speak in public.

Some abolitionists, like Sojourner Truth, were former slaves. Truth had always been strongly spiritual and had preached throughout the North at religious meetings and on street corners. When she met Douglass and Garrison, their enthusiasm inspired her to speak out loudly about slavery. An outstanding speaker, Truth argued that God would end slavery peacefully.

Abolitionists were a minority, even in the North. But their efforts, and the violence directed at them, helped change Northerners' attitudes toward slavery. In addition, the antislavery fight helped pave the way for the next great reform movement: the struggle for women's rights.

Section 6 - Equal Rights for Women

Women abolitionists were in a strange position. They were trying to convince lawmakers to make slavery illegal, yet they themselves could not vote or hold office. They worked to raise money for the movement, yet their fathers and husbands controlled their money and property. They spoke out against slave beatings, yet their husbands could discipline them however they wanted.

Even wealthy women like the Grimke sisters started to see that women and slaves had much in common. "What then can woman do for the slave," asked Angelina Grimke, "when she is herself under the feet of man and shamed into silence?"

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The Movement Begins The organized movement for women's rights was sparked by the friendship between Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The two women met in 1840 at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. When they arrived, they were outraged to discover that women were not allowed to speak at the meeting. The men who ran the convention made women sit in the balcony, behind a curtain.

The men's decision may have backfired, because it was in the balcony that Mott and Stanton met. At first glance, the two women seemed quite different. Mott was 47 years old, the mother of four children, and an active reformer. Inspired by the Grimke sisters and her Quaker faith, Mott had preached against slavery in both white and black churches. She had also helped Prudence Crandall try to find students for her school for black girls.

Stanton was 25 years old and newly married. She had never spoken in public. As a young girl, she had overheard women beg her father, a judge, to protect them from husbands who had beaten them. He had to tell them that there was no law against it. Later, she attended Troy Female Seminary, the nation's first high school for girls. She knew from her history studies that the United States did not treat women

fairly. When she met Mott in London, she readily agreed that something had to be done about the injustices suffered by women.

Unequal Treatment of Women Even a fine education like Stanton's did not mean women would receive equal treatment. When Lucy Stone graduated from Oberlin College in 1847, the faculty invited her to write a speech. But a man would have to give the speech, since the school did not allow women to speak in public. Stone refused. After graduation, she spoke out for women's rights. Because women could not vote, she refused to pay property taxes. "Women suffer taxation," she said, "and yet have no representation."

Stone's sister-in-law, Elizabeth Blackwell, wanted to be a doctor. She had studied mathematics, science, and history. Yet she was rejected by 29 medical schools before one finally accepted her. In 1849, she graduated at the top of her class, becoming the country's first female doctor. Still, no hospitals or doctors would agree to work with her.

To overcome such barriers, women would have to work together. By the time Stanton and Mott left London, they had decided "to hold a convention . . . and form a society to advocate the rights of women."

The Seneca Falls Convention Eight years passed before Stanton and Mott met again. Over afternoon tea at the home of Mott's sister, they decided to send a notice to the local newspaper announcing a women's convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The organized movement for women's rights was about to begin.

On July 19, 1848, nearly 300 people, including 40 men, arrived for the Seneca Falls Convention. Many were abolitionists, Quakers, or other reformers. Some were local housewives, farmers, and factory workers.

The convention organizers modeled their proposal for women's rights, the Declaration of Sentiments, on the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," the document began, "that all men and women are created equal."

Just as the Declaration of Independence listed King George's acts of tyranny over the colonists, the new declaration listed acts of tyranny by men over women. Man did not let woman vote. He did not give her the right to own property. He did not allow her to practice professions like medicine and law.

Stanton's presentation of the declaration at the convention was her first speech. A few other women also spoke. One of them, Charlotte Woodward, was a 19-year-old factory worker. "Every fibre of my being," she said, "rebelled [against] all the hours that I sat and sewed gloves for a miserable pittance [small amount of money] which, as it was earned, could never be mine."

Debate About the Right to Vote The convention passed resolutions in favor of correcting the injustices listed in the Declaration of Sentiments. Then Stanton proposed that women demand the right to vote. For many, this step was too much. Even Mott cried, "Thou will make us ridiculous! We must go slowly."

At this point, Stanton received powerful support from another participant at the convention: Frederick Douglass. Everyone who believed that black men should have the right to vote, Douglass argued, must also favor giving black women the right to vote. And that meant all women should have this important right. Inspired by Douglass's speech, the convention voted narrowly to approve this last resolution.

The Legacy of Seneca Falls The Seneca Falls Convention helped to create an organized campaign for women's rights. Sojourner Truth, who would later mesmerize an audience with her "Ain't I a woman?" speech, became an active campaigner in the movement.

Stanton didn't like speaking at conventions, but she could write powerful speeches. She befriended Susan B. Anthony, a reformer with a flair for public speaking. While Stanton stayed in Seneca Falls to raise her children, Anthony traveled from town to town, speaking for women's rights. Of their lifelong teamwork, Stanton said, "I forged the thunderbolts, she fired them."

Slowly, reformers for women's rights made progress. New York gave women control over their property and wages. Massachusetts and Indiana passed more liberal divorce laws. Elizabeth Blackwell started her own hospital, which included a medical school to train other female doctors.

Other reforms, including the right to vote in all states, would take decades to become reality. Of all the women who signed the declaration at Seneca Falls, just one would live to vote for president legally: Charlotte Woodward.

Summary

In this chapter, you read about the reform movements in the United States from about 1820 to 1850.

The Spirit of Reform Many Americans were inspired by the Second Great Awakening, which emphasized the role of good works in the lives of Christians. Transcendentalist writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who urged people to question society's rules and institutions, also inspired Americans. Some transcendentalists formed communities that attempted to create an ideal society of cooperation.

Prison Reform Dorothea Dix pioneered the reform of prisons and the treatment of people with mental illness. Her efforts led to improvements in state prison systems and the creation of public institutions and hospitals for the mentally ill.

Education Reform Horace Mann led the movement to make education freely available to all. His ideas led many Northern states to establish public schools. Education reform did not improve opportunities for most girls, women, and African Americans, however.

The Movement to End Slavery Inspired in part by religious revivalism, abolitionists worked to end the practice of slavery. Key leaders in the movement included William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Angelina and Sarah Grimke, and Sojourner Truth.

Equal Rights for Women The women's rights movement began with the Seneca Falls Convention and its Declaration of Sentiments. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the convention. Susan B. Anthony was another key leader in the movement.

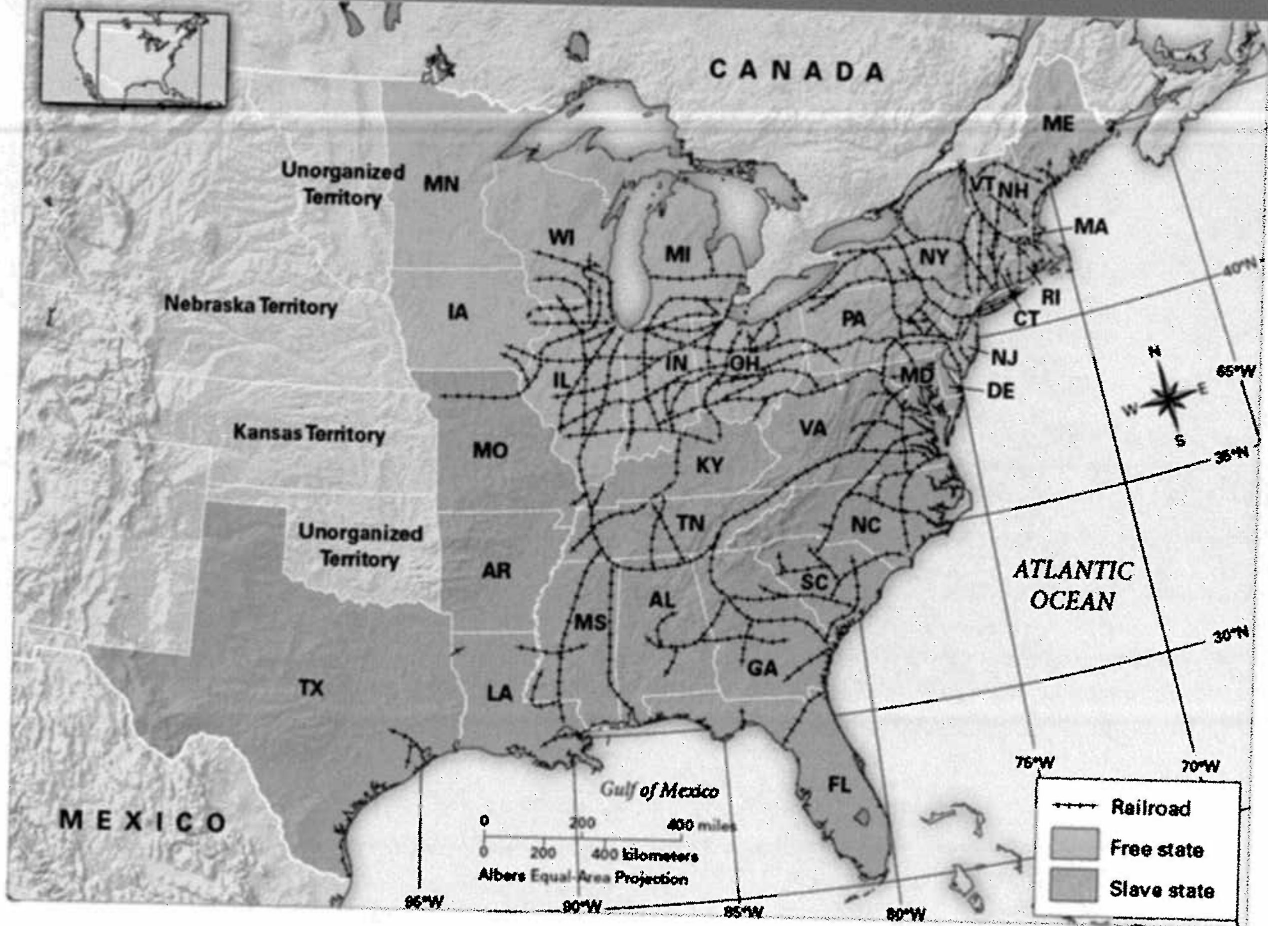
The Worlds of North and South

Overview and Objectives

Overview
In a Visual Discovery activity, students analyze and bring to life images from the mid-1800s to compare the different ways of life in the North and the South.

Objectives
In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will
Social Studies
• analyze images to hypothesize how the geographies, economies, types of transportation, and societies differed in the North and South.
• compare the economies and societies of the North and South by re-creating scenes from the two regions.
• explain the effects of new inventions and manufacturing methods on the North and South.
• examine the geographic, economic, and political factors involved in building a network of roads, canals, and railroads.
Language Arts
• interpret analogies.
• write a narrative that employs descriptive strategies.

Social Studies Vocabulary
Key Content Terms deforestation, agrarian, plantation, cotton gin, Industrial Revolution, industrialist, immigrant
Academic Vocabulary manual, innovation, drastic, internal, hostility


U.S. Railroads, 1860
CANADA
Unorganized Territory
MN
WI
MI
ME
VT
NH
MA
NY
RI
CT
Nebraska Territory
IA
PA
NJ
IN
OH
IL
MD
DE
Kansas Territory
MO
VA
KY
Unorganized Territory
TN
NC
AR
SC
ATLANTIC OCEAN
AL
MS
GA
TX
LA
FL
Gulf of Mexico
MEXICO
Railroad
Free state
Slave state
Albers Equal-Area Projection

The Worlds of North and South

How was life in the North different from life in the South?

Section 1 - Introduction

Inventor Eli Whitney's cotton gin would greatly affect life in both the North and the South.

Eli Whitney, a young man from Massachusetts, listened politely to the Georgia planters' complaints. Tobacco prices were low, and rice and indigo prices weren't much better. Cotton grew well, but cleaning the seeds out of cotton fibers was a big problem. A slave picking out seeds by hand could clean only a few pounds a day. At that rate, even using cheap slave labor, there was little profit in raising cotton.

As the planters talked, a solution to their problem began to take shape in Whitney's mind. While growing up in Massachusetts, Whitney had revealed a gift for invention. As a boy, he had invented a machine to manufacture nails more quickly than making them by hand. From nails, he had gone on to hat pins and men's canes. After graduating from college in 1792, Whitney went to Georgia to work as a tutor. Instead of tutoring, however, he became intrigued by the problem of cotton cleaning and, he wrote, "struck out a plan of a Machine in my mind."

The result, as you will read, was an invention that changed life in both the North and the South—but in very different ways. This probably did not surprise Whitney. As a Northerner living in the South, he had already noticed many differences between the two areas of the country.

Geography, economy, transportation, and society made life in the North very different from life in the South.

As American citizens, Northerners and Southerners shared a fierce pride in their country and a faith in democracy. Yet their outlooks and attitudes about many things were quite different. The two areas also differed in their economies, transportation systems, and societies. Between 1800 and 1850, these differences led to sharply conflicting views on many national issues—so much so that, at times, Northerners and Southerners seemed to be living in two separate worlds.

Section 2 - Geography of the North

From the rocky shores of Maine to the gently rolling plains of Iowa, the North had a variety of climates and natural features. Northerners adapted to these geographical differences by creating different industries and ways of making a living.

Climate All the Northern states experienced four distinct seasons, from freezing winters to hot, humid summers. But the most northerly states, such as Maine and Minnesota, had colder winters and shorter summer growing seasons than states farther south, such as Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Natural Features Different areas of the North had distinctive natural features. The jagged New England coast, for example, had hundreds of bays and inlets that were perfect for use as harbors. Shipbuilding, fishing, and commerce flourished in this area, while towns such as Boston became busy seaports.

Inland from the sea lay a narrow, flat plain with a thin covering of rocky soil. Farming was not easy here. Instead, many people turned to trade and crafts. Others moved west in search of better farmland.

New England's hills rose sharply above V-shaped valleys carved by steep streams. The hillsides offered barely enough land for small farms, but they were covered with thick forests of spruce and fir. New Englanders found that they could make money by harvesting timber. The wood was used for shipbuilding and in trade with other countries.

Farther south in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, broad rivers like the Hudson and the Delaware had deposited rich soil over the plains. People living in these areas supported themselves by farming.

Across the Appalachian Mountains lay the Central Plains, a large, forested region drained by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The Central Plains boast some of the best agricultural soil in the world. From Ohio to Illinois, settlers cleared the forests to make way for farms.

Industrious Northerners were thus changing the landscape. One result was deforestation, or the clearing of forests. By 1850, Americans had cleared about 177,000 square miles of dense forest. And with the growth of industry, the demand for coal and other minerals led to a big increase in mining after about 1820, especially in Pennsylvania.

Section 3 - Geography of the South

The South extended from Maryland south to Florida and from the Atlantic Coast west to Louisiana and Texas. Climate and natural features encouraged Southerners to base their way of life on agriculture.

Climate Compared to the North, the Southern states enjoyed mild winters and long, hot, humid summers. Plentiful rainfall and long growing seasons made this a perfect place for raising warm-weather crops that would have withered and died farther north.

Natural Features Wide coastal plains edged the southern shoreline from Chesapeake Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. These fertile lowlands stretched inland for as much as 300 miles in parts of the South.

Along the coast, the plains were dotted with swamps and marshes. These damp lowlands were ideal for growing rice and sugarcane, which thrived in warm, soggy soil. Indigo was grown on the dry land above the swamps, and tobacco and corn were farmed farther inland. A visitor to this area noted that "the Planters by the richness of the Soil, live [in] the most easie and pleasant Manner of any People I have ever met with."

Above the plains rose the Appalachians. Settlers who ventured into this rugged backcountry carved farms and orchards out of rolling hills and mountain hollows. Some backcountry farmers worked on land so steep that it was joked that they kept falling out of their cornfields.

Although most people in the South were farmers, Southerners used natural resources in other ways as well. In North Carolina, they harvested thick pine forests for lumber. From Chesapeake Bay in Virginia and Maryland, they gathered fish, oysters, and crabs.

An especially important feature of the South was its broad, flat rivers. Many of the South's earliest towns were built at the mouths of rivers. As people moved away from the coast, they followed the rivers inland, building their homes and farms alongside these water highways. Oceangoing ships could even sail up Southern rivers to conduct business right at a planter's private dock. Here, the ships were loaded with tobacco or other cash crops for sale in the Caribbean or Europe.

Section 4 - Economy of the South

The South's economy was based on agriculture. Most white Southerners were agrarians who favored a way of life based on farming. This was especially true of rich plantation owners, who did not have to do the hard work of growing crops themselves.

Although most white Southerners worked their own small farms, plantation owners used slaves to grow such cash crops as tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and indigo. By the early 1790s, however, the use of slaves had begun to decline. Europeans were unwilling to pay high prices for tobacco and rice, which they could purchase more cheaply from other British colonies. Cotton was a promising crop, but growers who experimented with it had a hard time making a profit. Until some way was found to clean the seeds out of its fiber easily, cotton was of little value. Discouraged planters were buying fewer slaves, and even letting some go free.

In 1793, a young Yale graduate named Eli Whitney took a job tutoring children on a Georgia plantation. There, he saw his first cotton boll. Observing the way cotton was cleaned by hand, Whitney had an idea. "If a machine could be invented which would clean the Cotton with expedition [speed]," he wrote his father, "it would be a great thing . . . to the Country."

Whitney set to work. Six months later, he had a working machine that would change agriculture in the South.

The cotton gin, invented in 1793, made the process of separating cotton fi ber from the seeds quicker.

The Impact of the Cotton Gin Whitney's "cotton engine," called the cotton gin for short, was a simple machine that used rotating combs to separate cotton fiber from its seeds. Using a cotton gin, a single worker could clean as much cotton as 50 laborers working manually, or by hand.

Across the South, planters began growing cotton. Within ten years, cotton was the South's most important crop. By 1860, sales of cotton overseas earned more than all other U.S. exports combined.

Section 5 - Economy of the North

While the cotton gin made cotton the South's dominant crop, other types of machines were causing changes in the North. The people and the ideas behind these machines were part of the Industrial

Revolution, which began in England in the late 1700s and spread to the United States and the rest of the world by the early 1800s. During the Industrial Revolution, people shifted from making things and doing work by hand to making things and doing work with machines. It created a new class of workers as well as a new class of industrialists, owners of large factories and other businesses based on manufacturing.

The fast-flowing rivers of the North provided the power source for textile mills,

The Growth of Industry in the North One of the people who helped bring the Industrial Revolution to the United States was Francis Cabot Lowell, a Boston business owner. In 1810, Lowell visited England. There he saw how textile mill owners were using machines to spin cotton into thread and weave the thread into cloth. To power these devices, they used fast-moving streams to turn a wheel, which in turn supplied energy to the machinery.

Lowell memorized the design of the British machines. When he returned to Massachusetts, he built even better ones. By 1815, he and his partners had built one of the first American textile factories, along the Merrimack River outside Boston. This factory combined spinning and weaving machinery in the same building. One observer marveled that Lowell's mill "took your bale of cotton in at one end and gave out yards of cloth at the other, after goodness knows what digestive process."

To run his machinery, Lowell hired young women, who jumped at the chance to earn cash wages. The "Lowell girls" toiled 12 to 15 hours each day, with only Sundays off. Soon textile mills were springing up all along other Northern rivers.

By the 1830s, inventors in both the United States and Europe had learned to use steam engines to power machinery. With steam engines, businesspeople could build factories anywhere, not just along rivers. Meanwhile, the inventive Eli Whitney showed manufacturers how they could assemble products even more cheaply by making them from identical, interchangeable parts.

New inventions and manufacturing methods made goods cheaper and more plentiful. But these innovations also shifted work from skilled craftspeople to less-skilled laborers. When Elias Howe developed the sewing machine in 1846, for example, skilled seamstresses could not compete. Some took jobs in garment factories, but they earned much less money working the sewing machines than they had sewing by hand.

For Northern industrialists, the new machines and production methods were a source of great wealth. Factory owners tended to favor a strong national government that could promote improvements in manufacturing, trade, and transportation. Southern agrarians, however, looked down on the newly rich industrialists and the laborers who worked for them. Proud Southerners called factory workers "wage slaves." But they also worried that Northern interests might grow too powerful and threaten the South's way of life.

Machines Make Agriculture More Efficient The Industrial Revolution had effects on farming as well. New machines increased the rate at which agricultural goods could be produced. In 1831, Virginia farmer

Cyrus McCormick built a working model of "a right smart" machine called a reaper. A reaper could cut 28 times more grain than a single man using a scythe, which is a hand tool with a long, curved blade.

In 1847, McCormick built a reaper factory in Chicago, Illinois. Using interchangeable parts, his factory was soon producing several thousand reapers a year.

Around the same time, John Deere invented the steel-tipped plow. This innovation drastically reduced the amount of labor needed to plow a field. By making it easier to plant and harvest large quantities of wheat, inventions like the steel-tipped plow and the reaper helped transform the Central Plains into America's "bread basket." Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, the Northern economy grew rapidly after 1800. By 1860, the value of manufacturing in the North was ten times greater than in the South.

Expanding Demand for Land and Slaves Raising cotton in the same fields year after year soon wore out the soil. In search of fresh, fertile soil, cotton planters pushed west. By 1850, cotton plantations stretched from the Atlantic Coast to Texas.

Whitney had hoped his invention would lighten the work of slaves. Instead, it made slavery more important to the South than ever. As cotton spread westward, slavery followed. Between 1790 and 1850, the number of slaves in the South rose from 500,000 to more than 3 million.

With many white Southerners putting money into land and slaves, the South had little interest in building factories. As a result, wrote an Alabama newspaper, "We purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North . . . the slaveholder dresses in Northern goods, rides in a Northern saddle, sports his Northern carriage, reads Northern books. In Northern vessels his products are carried to market."

One successful Southern factory was the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. Using mostly slave labor, the factory made ammunition and weapons for the U.S. army, as well as steam engines, rails, and locomotives. But the vast majority of white Southerners made their living off the land.

Section 6 - Transportation in the North

Factory owners needed fast, inexpensive ways to deliver their goods to distant customers. South Carolina congressman John C. Calhoun had a solution. "Let us bind the republic together," he said, "with a perfect system of roads and canals." Calhoun called such projects internal improvements.

Building Better Roads In the early 1800s, most American roads were rutted boneshakers. In 1806, Congress funded the construction of a National Road across the Appalachian Mountains. The purpose of this highway was to connect the new western states with the East. With its smooth gravel surface, the National Road was a joy to travel.

As popular as the National Road was, in 1816 President James Monroe vetoed a bill that would have given states money to build more roads. Monroe argued that spending federal money for a state's internal improvements was unconstitutional.

Fast Ships and Canals Even with better roads, river travel was still faster and cheaper than travel by land. But moving upstream against a river's current was hard work. To solve this problem, inventors in both the United States and Europe experimented with boats powered by steam engines.

In 1807, Robert Fulton showed that steamboats were practical by racing the steamboat Clermont upstream on New York's Hudson River. Said Fulton, "I overtook many boats and passed them as if they had been at anchor." A Dutchman watching the strange craft from the shore shouted, "The devil is on his way up-river with a sawmill on a boat!" By the 1820s, smoke-belching steamboats were chugging up and down major rivers and across the Great Lakes.

Of course, rivers weren't always located where people needed them. In 1817, the state of New York hired engineers and workers to build a 363-mile canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The Erie Canal provided the first all-water link between farms on the Central Plains and East Coast cities. It was so successful that other states built canals as well.

Overseas traders also needed faster ways to travel. Sailing ships sometimes took so long to cross the Pacific Ocean that the goods they carried spoiled. In the 1840s, sleek clipper ships were introduced that cut ocean travel time in half. The clipper ships led to increased Northern trade with foreign ports around the world.

Traveling by Rail The future of transportation, however, lay not on water, but on rails. Inspired by the success of steamboats, inventors developed steam-powered locomotives. These trains traveled faster than steamboats and could go wherever tracks could be laid—even across mountains.

So many railroad companies were laying tracks that, by the 1840s, railroads were the North's biggest business. By 1860, more than 20,000 miles of rail linked Northern factories to cities hundreds of miles away.

Section 7 - Transportation in the South

Most of the rail lines in the United States were in the North. In the South, people and goods continued to move on rivers. The slow current and broad channels of Southern rivers made water travel easy and relatively cheap.

Cotton was the most important Southern product shipped by water. On plantation docks, slaves loaded cotton bales directly onto steam-powered riverboats. The riverboats then traveled hundreds of miles downstream to such port cities as Savannah, Georgia, or Mobile, Alabama. West of the Appalachians, most cotton moved down the Mississippi River, the largest of all the Southern waterways. The cotton boom made New Orleans, the port at the mouth of the Mississippi, one of the South's few big cities. Once the cotton reached the sea, it was loaded onto sailing ships headed for ports in England or the North.

Because river travel was the South's main form of transportation, most Southern towns and cities sprang up along waterways. With little need for roads or canals to connect these settlements,

Southerners opposed bills in Congress that would use federal funds for internal improvements. Such projects, they believed, would benefit the North far more than the South.

Some railroads were built in the South, including lines that helped Southern farmers ship their products to the North. Southerners were proud of the fact that the iron rails for many of the area's railroads came from Virginia's Tredegar Iron Works. Still, in 1860 the South had just 10,000 miles of rail, compared with over 20,000 miles in the North.

Section 8 - Society in the South

For the most part, the South was not greatly affected by the Jacksonian spirit of equality and opportunity or the reform movements of the mid-1800s. Many Southerners in 1860 still measured wealth in terms of land and slaves. The result was a rigid social structure with a few rich plantation owners at the top, white farmers and workers in the middle, and African Americans—mostly enslaved—at the bottom.

Slavery deeply affected the lives of all Southerners, black and white. As long as the slave economy could be preserved, the South had little incentive to make progress economically or culturally. Even religion was affected. Southern church leaders defended the practice—taking a position that divided them from many churches in the North, whose leaders taught that slavery was un-Christian. In the words of one historian, "The South grew, but it did not develop."

White Southerners A small group of wealthy plantation owners dominated the economy and politics of the South. They enjoyed a leisurely way of life, filled with parties and social visits. While their sons often went to colleges and universities, their daughters received little education. Instead, girls were brought up to be wives and hostesses.

Most white families owned some land, but only about one in four owned even one slave. The majority of white families worked their own fields and made most of what they needed themselves. About 10 percent of whites were too poor to own any land. They rented rugged mountain or forest land and paid the rent with the crops they raised. Since public schools were few and often inferior to those in the North, many white children were illiterate.

African Americans in the South A small minority of the African Americans in the South were free blacks. Free blacks were often forced to wear special badges, pay extra taxes, and live separately from whites. Most lived in towns and cities, where they found jobs as skilled craftspeople, servants, or laborers.

The great majority of African Americans in the South were slaves. Some worked as cooks, carpenters, blacksmiths, house servants, or nursemaids. But most were field hands who labored from dawn until past dusk.

Section 9 - Society in the North

As in the South, most people in the North were neither wealthy nor powerful. By 1860, about seven in ten Northerners still lived on farms. But more and more Northerners were moving to towns and cities.

Between 1800 and 1850, the number of cities with populations of at least 2,500 had increased from 33 to 237. Except for a few cities around the Great Lakes, such as Chicago and Detroit, nearly all of the 50 largest urban areas were in the Northeast. Only 12 were in the slave states of the South. And Northern cities were growing rapidly. Between 1840 and 1860, the populations of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston nearly tripled. By 1860, more than a million people lived in New York.

New or old, Northern cities often lacked sewers and paved streets. In dirty and crowded neighborhoods, diseases spread rapidly. "The streets are filthy," wrote one observer about New York City, "and the stranger is not a little surprised to meet the hogs walking about in them, for the purpose of devouring the vegetables and offal [trash] thrown into the gutter."

African Americans in the North After the American Revolution, all of the Northern states had taken steps to end slavery. Although blacks in the North were free, they were not treated as equal to whites. In most states, they could not vote, hold office, serve on juries, or attend white churches and schools.

African Americans responded by forming their own churches and starting their own businesses. Because few employers would give them skilled jobs, African Americans often worked as laborers or servants.

Immigrants Arrive in the North Between 1845 and 1860, four million immigrants—most of them from Ireland and Germany—swelled the North's growing population. In Ireland, a potato famine from 1845 to 1849 drove hundreds of thousands of families to the United States. In the German states, failed revolutions sent people fleeing overseas. Some immigrants had enough money to buy land and farm. But most settled in cities, where they found jobs in mills and factories.

Some Americans resented the newcomers, especially the Irish. Irish immigrants faced hostility because they were Roman Catholic. The United States at the time was mostly Protestant. In addition, many Irish immigrants were poor. Because they would accept very low wages, they were thought to take jobs away from native-born workers. German immigrants did not experience the same hostility that Irish immigrants endured. Most German immigrants were Protestant and middle class.

Between 1820 and 1860, more than one-third of all U.S. immigrants came from Ireland. More than 1 million Irish immigrants came to the United States between 1846 and 1855. Too poor to travel, most of them settled in northeastern cities, including New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Summary

In this chapter, you learned how the North and the South developed differently from each other in the first half of the 1800s.

Geography Geography was one reason why Northerners and Southerners developed different ways of life. In the North, physical features such as harbors encouraged the growth of shipbuilding, fishing, and commerce. The land and climate supported the harvesting of timber and such crops as corn and wheat. In the South, the climate and land was ideal for warm-weather crops like cotton, rice, and sugarcane.

Economy In contrast to the variety of trades and businesses in the North, the South depended primarily on agriculture. Although only a minority of white Southerners owned slaves, much of the South's economy depended on slave labor. In the North, the new inventions of the Industrial Revolution led to the development of mills and factories. Increasing numbers of people went to work as wage earners.

Transportation Steamboats and railroads improved transportation for Northerners, making it easier for them to travel and to ship goods over long distances. In the South, however, people continued to travel by river, and rail lines were fewer.

Society In the South, the wealthy few enjoyed great influence and power. But even the poorest whites ranked above African Americans, whether free or slave. The North, too, had its wealthy class. But farmers and laborers alike believed they could create comfortable lives for their families through hard work.

African Americans in the Mid-1800s

Overview and Objectives

Overview
In a Writing for Understanding activity, students analyze quotations and examine images to discover how African Americans faced slavery and
discrimination in the mid-1800s. They then create a journal describing some
of the experiences of a slave in the period.

Objectives
In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will
Social Studies
• compare the lives and opportunities of free blacks in the North with those of free blacks in the South.
• describe aspects of slave life and forms of resistance to slavery.
• describe and illustrate how slaves faced slavery and discrimination.
Language Arts
• interpret an analogy.
• write a narrative that employs descriptive strategies.

Social Studies Vocabulary
Key Content Terms racism, discrimination, segregation, Underground
Railroad, Nat Turner's Rebellion, oppression
Academic Vocabulary reformer, passive, sympathetic, evident

Moses

Moses, Moses, don't you let King Pharaoh overtake you *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

Hm, hm, I hear the chariot comin' *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

Moses, Moses, I hear the horses runnin' *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

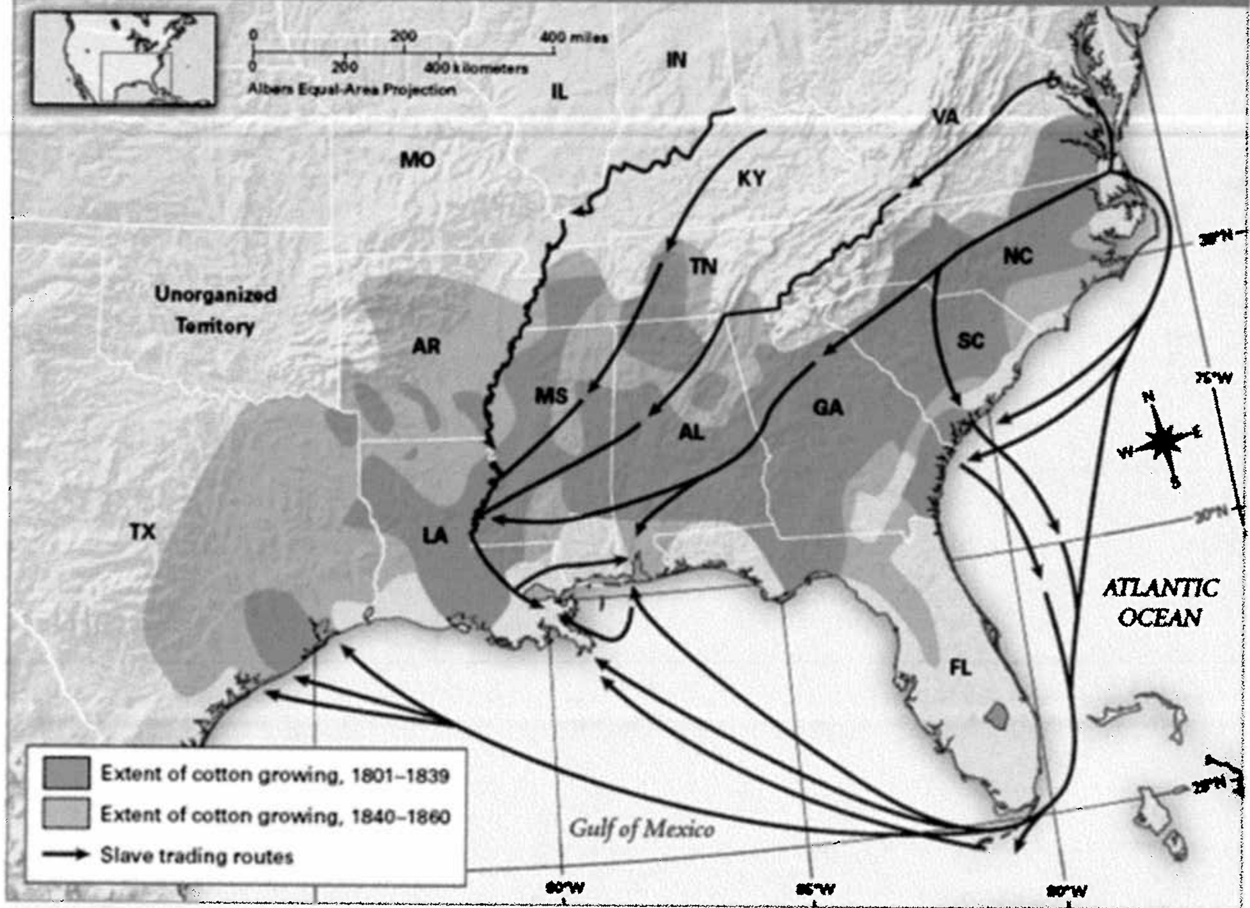
Hm, hm, I hear Jordan rollin' *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

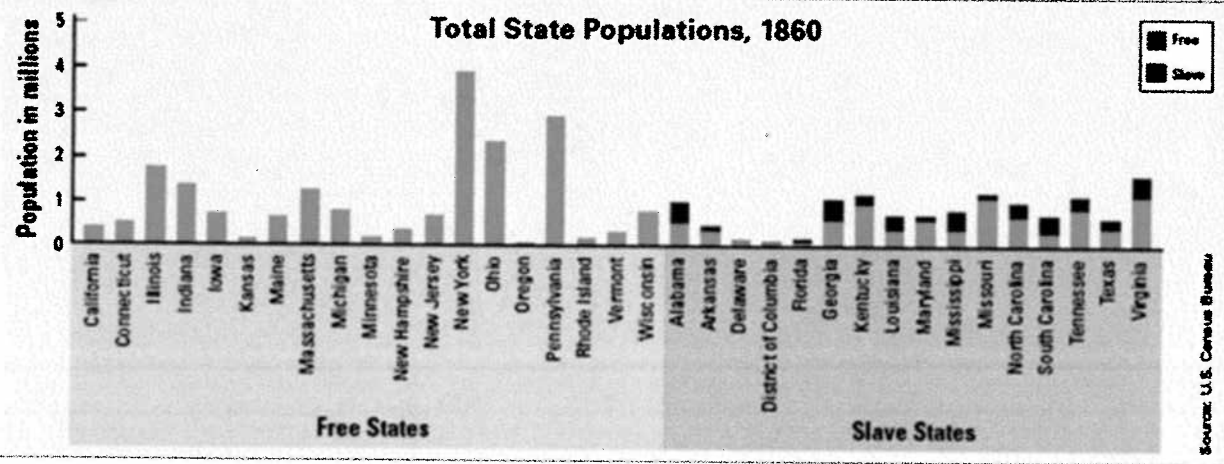
Mother, mother, don't let your daughter condemn you *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

Hm, hm, I hear the angels moaning *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

Jordan, Jordan, let the children over *(3 times)*
In some lonesome graveyard.

(Based on a traditional spiritual)


The Slave System, 1801–1860
200
400 miles
200
400 kilometers
Albers Equal-Area Projection
IN
IL
MO
KY
VA
TN
NC
Unorganized Territory
AR
SC
MS
AL
GA
TX
LA
FL
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Gulf of Mexico
Extent of cotton growing, 1801–1839
Extent of cotton growing, 1840–1860
Slave trading routes


Total State Populations, 1860
Population in millions
5
4
3
2
1
0
Free
Slave
California
Connecticut
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Maine
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
Ohio
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
Vermont
Wisconsin
Alabama
Arkansas
Delaware
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
North Carolina
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Virginia
Free States
Slave States
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

African Americans in the Mid-1800s

How did African Americans face slavery and discrimination in the mid-1800s?

Section 1 - Introduction

By 1850, the population of the United States had grown to just over 23 million. This figure included 3.6 million African Americans. The great majority of African Americans lived in slavery. Harriet Powers was one of them.

Powers was born into slavery in Georgia in 1837. Like many slaves, she grew up hearing Bible stories. In her quilts, she used animals and figures from Africa and the United States to illustrate those stories, along with scenes from her life. Hidden in her images were messages of hope and freedom for slaves.

Not all African Americans were slaves. By mid-century, there were about half a million free blacks as well. Many were former slaves who had escaped to freedom.

Whether African Americans lived in slavery or freedom, discrimination (unequal treatment) shaped their lives. Throughout the country, whites looked down on blacks. Whites ignored the contributions blacks made to American life. They thought of the United States as "their country." Such racist thinking later prompted African American scholar and reformer W. E. B. Du Bois to ask,

> Your country? How came it to be yours? Before the Pilgrims landed
>
> we were here. Here we brought you our three gifts and mingled them
>
> with yours; a gift of story and song, soft, stirring melody in an . . .
>
> unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn [physical strength]
>
> to beat back the wilderness . . . and lay the foundations of this
>
> vast economic empire . . . the third, a gift of the Spirit.

In this chapter, you will explore how African Americans faced and endured discrimination and slavery in the mid-1800s. You will also learn more about the gifts that African Americans brought to America.

Section 2 - North and South, Slave and Free

Free African Americans usually held low-paying jobs.

The experiences of African Americans in the mid-1800s depended on where they lived and whether they lived in slavery or freedom. Former slave Frederick Douglass toured the North talking to white audiences about slavery. To him, the biggest difference between slaves and free blacks was their legal status. Free blacks had some rights by law. Slaves did not. Whether free or slave, however, the lives of African Americans were shaped by racism, the belief that one race is superior to another.

Slaves' Legal Status The law defined slaves as property. Legally, slaveholders could do almost anything with their slaves. They could buy and sell slaves. They could leave slaves to their children or heirs. They could give slaves away to settle a bet. But in many states, they could not set slaves free.

As property, slaves had none of the rights that free people took for granted. "In law, the slave has no wife, no children, no country, no home," Douglass said. "He can own nothing, possess nothing, acquire nothing."

Rural and Urban Slaves Most slaves worked on farms and plantations across the South. By 1860, there were also about 70,000 slaves living in towns and cities. Most were hired out, or sent to work in factories, mills, or workshops. The wages they earned belonged to their owners. Often, urban slaves were allowed to "live out" on their own, rather than under the watchful eyes of their owners. Because of such freedom, observed Douglass, "A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation."

Free Blacks in the South About half of all free African Americans lived in the South. Most worked as laborers, craftspeople, or household servants in towns and cities.

Many white Southerners viewed free blacks as a dangerous group that had to be controlled so that, in the words of South Carolina slaveholders, they would not create "discontent among our slaves." Free blacks were forbidden to own guns. They could not travel freely from town to town or state to state. Blacks were not allowed to work at certain jobs. Such restrictions led Douglass to conclude, "No colored man is really free in a slaveholding state."

Free Blacks in the North African Americans in the North lived freer lives. But blacks experienced discrimination, or unequal treatment, everywhere they turned. In many states, African Americans were denied the right to vote. They had trouble finding good jobs. In the 1850s, some 87 percent of free blacks in New York held low-paying jobs. "Why should I strive hard?" asked one young African American. "What are my prospects? . . . No one will employ me; white boys won't work with me."

In addition to unequal treatment, policies of segregation separated blacks from whites in nearly all public places. Black children were often denied entry into public schools. Those states that did educate black children set up separate schools for that purpose. A New Yorker observed around 1860,

> Even the noblest black is denied that which is free to the vilest [worst]
>
> white. The omnibus, the [railroad] car, the ballot-box, the jury box,
>
> the halls of legislation, the army, the public lands, the school, the
>
> church, the lecture room, the social circle, the [restaurant] table,
>
> are all either absolutely or virtually denied to him.

Douglass discovered how deeply rooted this racism was when he tried to join a church in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and was turned away. "I tried all the other churches in New Bedford with the same result," he wrote.

African Americans responded to discrimination by organizing to help themselves. In 1816, Richard Allen, a former slave, became the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The AME, which still exists today, quickly became a center of African American life. Allen also created organizations to improve the lives of blacks, such as the African Society for the Education of Youth.

Other Northern blacks started their own schools, churches, and self-help organizations. In 1853, free blacks formed the National Council of Colored People to protest the unequal treatment they received. Such treatment, the council declared, "would humble the proudest, crush the energies of the strongest, and retard the progress of the swiftest." That blacks were neither humbled nor crushed by prejudice and discrimination was evidence of their courage and spirit.

Section 3 - The Economics of Slavery

Only wealthier planters could afford to buy slaves. The great majority of white Southerners did not own slaves. Why, then, did the South remain so loyal to slavery? Part of the answer to that question lies in the growth of the Southern economy after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793.

The cotton gin made cotton a hugely profitable cash crop in the South. In 1790, the South produced just 3,000 bales of cotton. By the 1850s, production had soared to more than 4 million bales a year. Cotton brought new wealth to the South. Robert Fogel, a historian who has studied the economics of slavery, wrote,

If we treat the North and South as separate nations . . . the South would stand as the fourth most prosperous nation of the world in 1860 . . . more prosperous than France, Germany, Denmark, or any of the countries in Europe except England.

Whether they owned slaves or not, white Southerners understood that their economy depended on cotton. They also knew that cotton planters depended on slave labor to grow their profitable crop. For planters with few or no slaves, however, the prospect of owning slaves became less likely as the demand for, and the price of, slaves rose.

High prices were both good and bad for the men and women trapped in slavery. As prices went up, slaves became more valuable to their owners. This may have encouraged slaveholders to take better care of their workers. At the same time, the rising value of their slaves made slaveholders less willing to listen to talk of ending slavery. In their eyes, freeing their slaves could only mean one thing: utter financial ruin.

Section 4 - Working Conditions of Slaves

Slaves worked on farms of various sizes. On small farms, owners and slaves worked side by side in the fields. On large plantations, planters hired overseers to supervise their slaves. Overseers were paid to

“care for nothing but to make a large crop.” To do this, they tried to get the most work possible out of the slaves who worked in the fields.

About three-quarters of rural slaves were field hands who toiled from dawn to dark tending crops. An English visitor described a field hand’s day:

He is called up in the morning at day break, and is seldom allowed time enough to swallow three mouthfuls of hominy [boiled corn], or hoecake [cornbread], but is driven out immediately to the field to hard labor . . . About noon . . . he eats his dinner, and he is seldom allowed an hour for that purpose . . . Then they return to severe labor, which continues until dusk.

Even then, a slave’s workday was not finished. After dark, there was still water to carry, wood to split, pigs to feed, corn to shuck, cotton to clean, and other chores to be done. One slave recalled,

I never know what it was to rest. I just work all the time from

morning till late at night. I had to do everything there was to do

on the outside. Work in the field, chop wood, hoe corn, till

sometime I feels like my back surely break.

Not all slaves worked in the fields. Some were skilled seamstresses, carpenters, or blacksmiths. Others worked in the master’s house as cooks or servants. When asked about her work, a house slave replied,

What kind of work I did? . . . I cooked, [then] I was house maid,

an’ I raised I don’t know how many [children] . . . I was always

good when it come to [the] sick, so [that] was mostly my job.

No matter how hard they worked, slaves could never look forward to an easier life. Most began work at the age of six and continued until they died. As one man put it, “Slave young, slave long.”

Most slave cabins consisted of a single room where the entire family lived. They had a fireplace f...

Most masters viewed their slaves as they did their land—things to be “worn out, not improved.” They provided only what was needed to keep their slaves healthy enough to work. Slaves lived crowded together in rough cabins. One recalled,

We lodged in log huts, and on bare ground. Wooden floors were an unknown luxury. In a single room were huddled, like cattle, ten or a dozen persons, men, women, and children . . . We had neither bedsteads, nor furniture of any description. Our beds were collections of straw and old rags, thrown down in the corners.

Slaves seldom went hungry. “Not to give a slave enough to eat,” reported Frederick Douglass, “is regarded as . . . meanness [stinginess] even among slaveholders.” Slaves received rations of cornmeal,

bacon, and molasses. Many kept gardens or hunted and fished to vary their diets. The owner described below fed his slaves well:

> Marse [master] Alec had plenty for his slaves to eat. There was
>
> meat, bread, collard greens, snap beans, 'taters, peas, all sorts of
>
> dried fruit, and just lots of milk and butter.

Slaves wore clothing made of coarse homespun linen or rough "Negro cloth." Northern textile mills made this cloth especially for slave clothes. Douglass reported that a field hand received a yearly allowance of "two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers . . . one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse Negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes." Children too young to work received "two coarse linen shirts per year. When these failed them, they went naked" until the next year.

While slaves were poorly housed and clothed compared to most white Southerners, they were more likely to receive medical care. Slaveholders often hired doctors to treat sick or injured slaves. Given doctors' limited medical knowledge, this care probably did little to improve slaves' health.

Section 6 - Controlling Slaves

Some slave owners beat or whipped slaves as a way of controlling them.

Slavery was a system of forced labor. To make this system work, slaveholders had to keep slaves firmly under control. Some slaveholders used harsh punishments—beating, whipping, branding, and other forms of torture—to maintain that control. But punishments often backfired on slaveholders. A slave who had been badly whipped might not be able to work for some time. Harsh punishments were also likely to make slaves feel more resentful and rebellious.

Slaveholders preferred to control their workforce by making slaves feel totally dependent on their masters. Owners encouraged such dependence by treating their slaves like grown-up children. They also kept their workers as ignorant as possible about the world beyond the plantation. Frederick Douglass's master said that a slave "should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as it is told to do."

Slaves who failed to learn this lesson were sometimes sent to slave-breakers. Such men were experts at turning independent, spirited African Americans into humble, obedient slaves. When he was 16, Douglass was sent to a slave breaker named Edward Covey.

Covey's method consisted of equal parts violence, fear, and overwork. Soon after Douglass arrived on Covey's farm, he received his first whipping. After that, he was beaten so often that "aching bones and a sore back were my constant companions."

Covey's ability to instill fear in his slaves was as effective as his whippings. Slaves never knew when he might be watching them. "He would creep and crawl in ditches and gullies," Douglass recalled, to spy on his workers.

Finally, Covey worked his slaves beyond endurance. Wrote Douglass,

> We worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow too hard for us to work in the field . . . The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first got there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me . . . I was broken in body, soul, and spirit . . . The dark night of slavery closed in upon me.

Section 7 - Resistance to Slavery

Despite the efforts of slaveholders to crush their spirits, slaves found countless ways to resist slavery. As former slave Harriet Jacobs wrote after escaping to freedom, "My master had power and law on his side. I had a determined will. There is might [power] in each."

Day-to-Day Resistance For most slaves, resistance took the form of quiet, or passive, acts of rebellion. Field hands pulled down fences, broke tools, and worked so sloppily that they damaged crops. House slaves sneaked food out of the master's kitchen.

Slaves pretended to be dumb, clumsy, sick, or insane to get out of work. One slave avoided working for years by claiming to be nearly blind, only to regain his sight once freed.

In some instances, resistance turned deadly when house servants put poison into slave owners' food. So many slaves set fire to their owners' homes and barns that the American Fire Insurance Company refused to insure property in the South.

Open Defiance Quiet resistance sometimes flared into open defiance. When pushed too hard, slaves refused to work, rejected orders, or struck back violently. Owners often described slaves who reacted in this way as "insolent" (disrespectful) or "unmanageable."

Frederick Douglass reached his breaking point one day when the slave breaker Covey began to beat him for no particular reason. Rather than take the blows, as he had so many times before, Douglass fought back. He wrestled Covey to the ground, holding him "so firmly by the throat that his blood followed my nails." For Douglass, this moment was "the turning point in my career as a slave."

> My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain

> a slave in form, the day had passed when I could be a slave
> in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white
> man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in
> killing me.

Covey knew this and never laid a hand on Douglass again.

Running Away Some slaves tried to escape by running away to freedom in the North. The risks were enormous. Slaveholders hired professional slave catchers and their packs of bloodhounds to hunt down runaway slaves. If caught, a runaway risked being mauled by dogs, brutally whipped, or even killed. Still, Douglass and countless other slaves took the risk.

Slaves found many ways to escape bondage. Some walked to freedom in the North, hiding by day and traveling at night when they could follow the North Star. Others traveled north by boat or train, using forged identity cards and clever disguises to get past watchful slave patrols. A few runaways mailed themselves to freedom in boxes or coffins.

Harriet Tubman

Thousands of runaways escaped to free states and to Canada with the help of the Underground Railroad, a secret network of free blacks and sympathetic whites. The members of the Underground Railroad provided transportation and "safe houses" where runaways could hide. A number of guides, or "conductors," risked their lives to help escaping slaves travel the "freedom train." One of the most successful was Harriet Tubman. Having escaped slavery herself, Tubman courageously returned to the South approximately 20 times between 1850 and 1860, guiding more than 300 men, women, and children to freedom.

Rebellion At times, resistance erupted into violent rebellion. Slave revolts occurred in cities, on plantations, and even on ships at sea. Fear of slave uprisings haunted slaveholders. Planters, wrote one visitor to the South, "never lie down to sleep without . . . loaded pistols at their sides."

In 1822, authorities in Charleston, South Carolina, learned that Denmark Vesey, a free black, was preparing to lead a sizable revolt of slaves. Vesey, along with more than 30 slaves, was arrested and hanged.

The bloodiest slave uprising in the South was organized in 1831 by Nat Turner, a black preacher.

Nine years later, in 1831, a slave named Nat Turner led a bloody uprising in Virginia. In what became known as Nat Turner's Rebellion, Turner and his followers set out to kill every white person they could find. Armed with axes and guns, they killed at least 57 people over a period of two days.

Vesey's and Turner's rebellions panicked white Southerners. In response, Southern states passed strict slave codes that tightened owners' control of their slaves and provided for harsher punishment of slaves by authorities. As one frightened Virginian remarked, "A Nat Turner might be in any family."

Section 8 - Slave Families and Communities

This photograph shows five generations of a slave family on a South Carolina plantation. Slaves of...

Slavery made community and family life difficult. Legally, slave families did not exist. No Southern state recognized slave marriages. Legal control of slave children rested not with their parents, but with their masters. Owners could break up slave families at any time by selling a father, a mother, or a child to someone else. Of all the things they endured, slaves most feared being sold away from their loved ones.

Most slaves grew up in families headed by a father and mother. Unable to marry legally, slaves created their own weddings, which often involved the tradition of jumping over a broomstick. One slave recalled,

> The preacher would say to the man, "Do you take this woman to
>
> be your wife?" He says, "Yes." "Well, jump the broom." After he
>
> jumped, the preacher would say the same to the woman. When
>
> she jumped, the preacher said, "I pronounce you man and wife."

Caring for children was never easy. Booker T. Washington's mother "snatched a few moments for our care in the early morning before her work began, and at night after the day's work was done." Still, parents found time to teach the lessons children would need to survive.

Silence around whites was one such lesson. Elijah Marrs recalled that "Mothers were necessarily compelled to be severe on their children to keep them from talking too much." Obedience was another lesson. William Webb's mother taught him "not to rebel against the men that were treating me like some dumb brute, making me work and refusing to let me learn."

Parents also taught their children other essential lessons about caring, kindness, pride, and hope. They taught them to respect themselves and other members of the slave community, especially older slaves. "There is not to be found, among any people," wrote Douglass, "a more rigid enforcement of the law of respect to elders."

These were the lessons that helped slaves, under the most difficult conditions, to create loving families and close communities. In doing so, they met the most basic of human needs—the need for a place to feel loved, respected, and safe.

Section 9 - Leisure Time Activities

These simple words capture the constant weariness that slaves endured:

Come day,

Go day,

God send Sunday.

Slaves toiled all week in fields that seemed to stretch "from one end of the earth to the other." But, on Saturday night and Sunday, their time was their own.

Saturday nights were a time for social events, like corn-husking or pea-shelling parties. These social events combined work and fun. One slave recalled,

> I've seen many a corn huskin' at ole Major's farm when the corn would be piled as high as the house. Two sets of men would start huskin' from opposite sides of the heap. It would keep one man busy just getting the husks out of the way, and the corn would be thrown over the husker's head and filling the air like birds. The women usually had a quilting at those times, so they were pert and happy.

A quilting bee was one of the rare times when slave women could gather to work and talk. In those few precious hours, they were free to express themselves with needle and cloth. The quilts they created were not only beautiful, but also very much needed as bedding for their families.

After the sewing, men joined the party for a "quilting feast" and dancing. Slaves made music out of almost anything. "Stretch cowhides over cheese-boxes and you had tambourines," one former slave recalled. "Saw bones from off a cow, knock them together, and call it a drum. Or use broom-straws, on fiddle-strings, and you had your entire orchestra."

Sunday was a day for religion and recreation. Slaves spent their Sundays going to church, eating, hunting, fishing, dancing, singing, telling tales, naming babies, playing games, and visiting with friends. In New Orleans, hundreds of slaves gathered on Sunday afternoons in public spaces to dance, sing, and talk. All of these activities helped African Americans forget the sorrows of slavery.

Section 10 - Slave Churches

Many slaveholders encouraged their slaves to attend church on Sunday. Some read the Bible to their workers and prayed with them. Owners and white ministers preached the same message: "If you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master."

Not surprisingly, this was not a popular lesson among slaves. "Dat ole white preacher [just] was telling us slaves to be good to our marsters," recalled Cornelius Garner. "We ain't kerr'd a bit 'bout dat stuff he was telling us 'cause we wanted to sing, pray, and serve God in our own way."

Instead, slaves created their own "invisible church" that brought together African roots and American needs. This invisible church met in slave quarters or secret forest clearings known as "hush arbors." One slave reported that,

> When [slaves] go round singing, "Steal Away to Jesus" that mean there going to be a religious meeting that night. The masters . . . didn't like them religious meetings, so us naturally slips off at night, down in the bottoms or somewheres. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.

Rather than teach about obedience, black preachers told the story of Moses leading his people out of slavery in Egypt. Black worshipers sang spirituals that expressed their desire for freedom and faith in a better world to come. One black preacher wrote,

> The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation [stopping] about half an hour . . . The old house partook of their ecstasy; it rang with their jubilant shouts, and shook in all its joints.

Whites sometimes criticized the enthusiasm of black worshipers, saying they lacked true religious feeling. Many slaves, however, believed it was their masters who lacked such feeling. "You see," explained one man, "religion needs a little motion—specially if you gwine [going to] feel de spirit."

Religion helped slaves bear their suffering and still find joy in life. In their prayers and spirituals, they gave voice to their deepest longings, their greatest sorrows, and their highest hopes.

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Section 11 - African American Culture

Africans arrived in the United States speaking many languages and following many cultural traditions. To survive, they had to learn a new language—English—and adopt a new way of life. Yet they did not forget their African roots. Across the South, slaves combined their old traditions and new realities to create a distinctive African American culture.

~~[illegible]~~

This combining of cultures is evident in Harriet Powers's story quilt. In square after square, Powers used animals from Africa and America to illustrate Bible stories that she learned as a slave on a Georgia plantation. The doves in her quilt are symbols of a slave's yearning for freedom. As one spiritual expressed, "Had I the wings of a dove, I'd fly away and be at rest."

You can also hear this combining of cultures in the songs and spirituals sung by slaves. These songs throb with the rhythms and harmonies of Africa, but speak about the realities of slavery. Slaves sang about faith, love, work, and the kindness and cruelty of masters. They also expressed their oppression, as in this song recorded by Frederick Douglass:

We raise the wheat, dey gib [they give] us the corn;

We bake the bread, dey gib us the cruss;

We sif the meal, dey gib us the huss;

We peel the meat, dey gib us the skin;

And dat's the way dey takes us in.

Slave dances were based on African traditions as well. Dancing helped slaves to put aside their cares, express their feelings, and refresh their spirits. According to one former slave, good dancers "could play a tune with their feet, dancing largely to an inward music, a music that was felt, but not heard."

African legends and folktales survived in the stories and jokes told by slaves. For example, Br'er Rabbit, the sly hero of many slave tales, was based on the African trickster Shulo the Hare. In these stories, the small but clever brother rabbit always managed to outwit larger, but duller, brother bear or brother fox—just as slaves hoped to outwit their more powerful masters.

Summary

These cards show scenes of slavery in the United States.

In this chapter, you learned what life was like for African Americans during the 1800s.

North and South, Slave and Free African Americans had a great impact on the development of American life. The South's economy was built on slave labor. Some blacks lived in freedom in the North and South, but nowhere could they escape racism and discrimination.

The Economics of Slavery Most white Southerners did not own slaves. Whether they owned slaves or not, whites understood that the South's economy depended on cotton and the slave labor needed to grow it.

Working and Living Conditions of Slaves All slaves worked constantly—in the fields, as house servants, or at skilled trades. Most slaves lived in simple, dirt-floor cabins.

Controlling Slaves and Resistance to Slavery Some slave owners used harsh punishments to control slaves. Most slaves resisted slavery using quiet acts of rebellion, while some fought back openly. At great risk, many tried to run away. Some slaveholders would rather kill runaways than allow them to escape.

Slave Families, Leisure, and Churches Enslaved African Americans created families and communities under the most difficult conditions. Slaves spent Saturday nights at social events and worshiped in their

own churches on Sundays. They prayed and sang spirituals to help themselves find joy and hope in their hard lives.

African American Culture Africans brought many languages and cultural traditions to the United States. The combination of old and new cultural traditions was expressed through their quilts, songs, dances, and folktales.