

Chapter 5

Antebellum Mississippi

Chapter Preview

PEOPLE

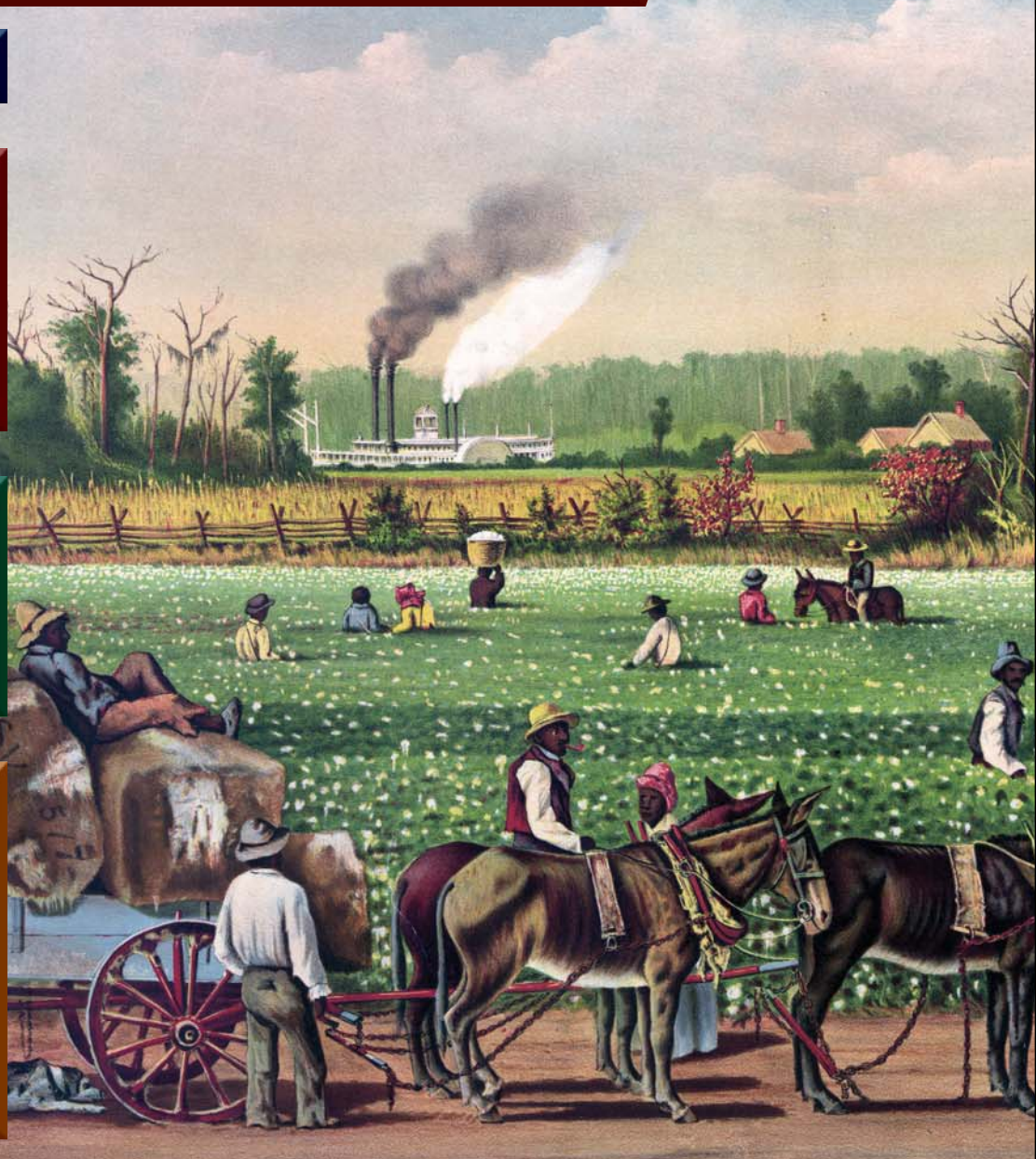
Eli Whitney, Walter Burling, Dr. Rush Nutt, Sallie Reneau, William Johnson, William Lloyd Garrison, Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, John C. Breckinridge, John Bell, John J. Pettus

PLACES

Cotton Kingdom; western territories; Oxford; Mississippi City; The University of Mississippi; Jamestown, Virginia; Liberia

TERMS

plantation, cotton gin, Mexican-Petit Gulf seed, tutor, section, sixteenth section funds, Chickasaw school funds, chattel slavery, overseer, driver, slave quarters, slave codes, praise meeting, American Colonization Society, states' rights, natural rights, Ordinance of Secession





In the Cotton Kingdom, white Mississippians developed a rugged individualism and a strict code of honor. They were suspicious of strangers but famous for their hospitality to friends and neighbors. According to Reuben Davis, a Congressman and Confederate general, Mississippians lived by a simple but stern creed:

A man ought to fear God, and mind his own business . . . be respectful and courteous to all women . . . love his friends and hate his enemies . . . eat when he was hungry, drink when he was thirsty, dance when he was merry, vote for the candidate he liked best, and knock down any man who questioned his right to these privileges.

Many African tribes were represented among Mississippi's black population, but most slaves were born in America. The primary environment for African Americans was the slave community where they lived according to standards and priorities they developed. Slaves also lived in the white man's world, where they were forced to live by rules and regulations over which they had no control.

In the early years of statehood, white Mississippians considered slavery an evil and wished they could rid themselves of the institution. As the slave population increased, and whites realized that they would soon be outnumbered, they regarded slavery as a "necessary evil." When abolitionist societies in the North began to condemn slavery as an evil institution and the South as an evil society, Mississippians defended slavery as a "positive good." Eventually, slave states decided that the only way they could maintain the "peculiar institution" was to secede from the Union and form a separate country where slavery would be legal.

There were many circumstances that influenced the customs, traditions, and attitudes of antebellum Mississippians. An examination of those influences will help us understand and appreciate the place we call Mississippi.

Left: William Aiken Walker created this idealized view of a cotton plantation on the Mississippi. Painted after the Civil War, the image shows a nostalgia for the "Old South."

Signs of the Times

EXPLORATION

In 1826, the first U.S. warship to circumnavigate the world, the *Vincennes*, left New York. In 1840, Captain Charles Wilkes explored Antarctica and claimed it for the United States. In 1853, the U.S. Navy under Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan, which had previously been closed to foreigners. One of Perry's ships was called the USS *Mississippi*.

MUSIC

Slave songs and spirituals were sung in the field to communicate and pass the time. Many songs, like "Go Down, Moses," had religious meaning. Other songs, like "Follow the Drinking Gourd" and "Wade in the Water," had secret messages that told slaves how to escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Stephen Foster composed his most famous songs, including "Camptown Races," "Oh! Susanna," and "Old Folks at Home," during this era.

ENTERTAINMENT

In 1835, P. T. Barnum began the first circus tour of the United States. In 1850, he introduced singer Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," to America. In 1851, the United States participated in the first World's Fair in history, in London. In 1853, the first World's Fair in the United States opened in New York City.

EDUCATION

Ohio's Oberlin College, founded in 1833, was a pioneer in the education of women and African Americans. It admitted women from its founding and regularly admitted African American students from 1835. It was a center for abolitionist activities and a key stop along the Underground Railroad.

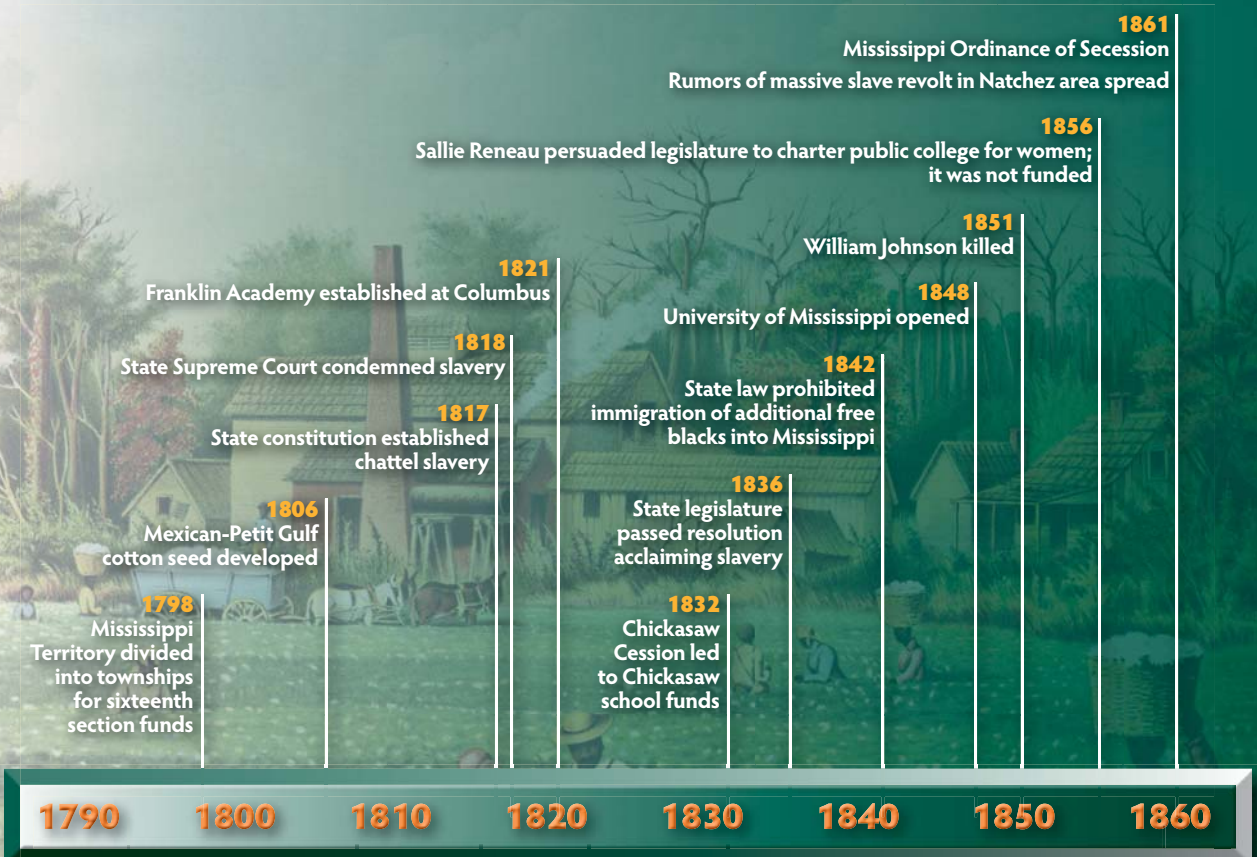
ARCHITECTURE

This was the time in the South of beautiful white-columned Greek Revival mansions. Prime Mississippi examples are Gloucester, Auburn, Waverley, and Stanton Hall. The largest and grandest mansion, Windsor, now a ruin near Port Gibson, was completed shortly before the Civil War began.

INVENTIONS

Many practical inventions that we use today were invented during the antebellum period. Elias Howe patented the sewing machine in 1846. The safety pin was patented in 1849. Baking powder was invented in 1859.

Figure 8 Timeline: 1793–1861



1790 1800 1810 1820 1830 1840 1850 1860

1793
Eli Whitney invented cotton gin

1806
Mexican-Petit Gulf cotton seed developed

1808
Importation of slaves into America made illegal

1816
American Colonization Society founded

1817
State constitution established chattel slavery

1818
State Supreme Court condemned slavery

1821
Franklin Academy established at Columbus

1831
William Lloyd Garrison established *The Liberator*
Nat Turner Slave Revolt in Virginia

1832
Chickasaw Cession led to Chickasaw school funds

1836
State legislature passed resolution acclaiming slavery

1842
State law prohibited immigration of additional free blacks into Mississippi

1848
University of Mississippi opened

1851
William Johnson killed

1856
Sallie Reneau persuaded legislature to charter public college for women; it was not funded

1861
Mississippi Ordinance of Secession
Rumors of massive slave revolt in Natchez area spread

1860
Election of President Abraham Lincoln

1861
Denmark Vesey Slave Revolt in South Carolina

Section 1

Heartland of the Cotton Kingdom

Below: The Springfield Plantation, near Fayette in Jefferson County, is one of the oldest continuously operating plantations in Mississippi. The Springfield mansion was built between 1786 and 1791. It was the first house in the Mississippi valley to have a full neoclassical colonnade across the front, a style that would become standard for plantation homes and mansions in the South. In 1811, the house was damaged by the New Madrid earthquake, 400 miles away!

As you read, look for

- how the cotton gin and the Mexican-Petit Gulf seed boosted the cotton economy;
- the categories of planters and farmers in antebellum Mississippi;
- the limited growth of educational opportunities and of towns;
- terms: **plantation, cotton gin, Mexican-Petit Gulf seed, tutor, section, sixteenth section funds, Chickasaw school funds.**



Before the Civil War, southerners referred to their social and cultural traditions as “the southern way of life.” To most white Mississippians, that way of life meant a **plantation** (a large agricultural estate) with its wealth and social prestige. They believed the plantation system was the highest form of civilization ever developed, and the hope that they would someday achieve that ideal was the motivation that led many Mississippians to support secession. An editorial in the *Vicksburg Sun* on April 9, 1860, indicates how *pervasive* (existing everywhere) that hope was:

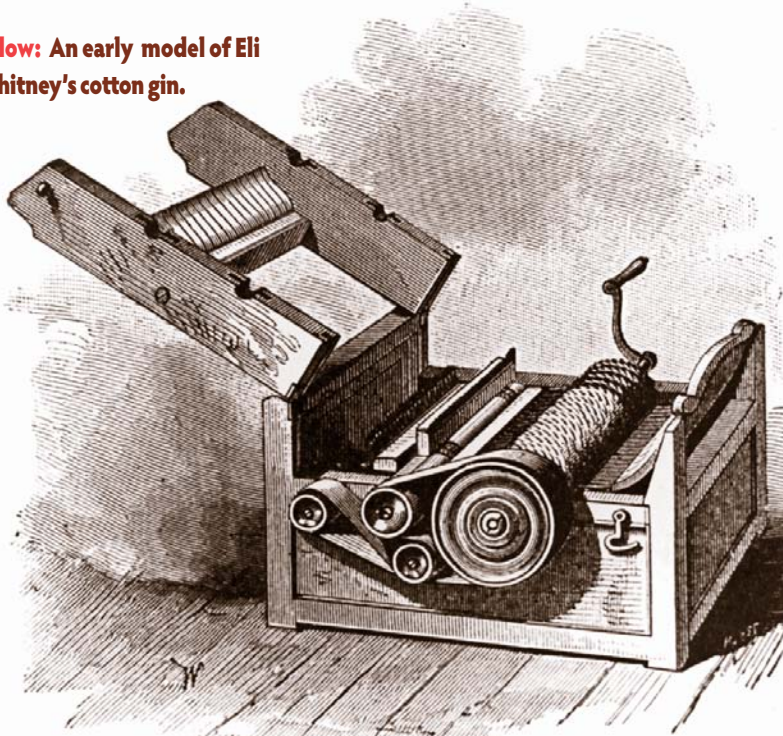
A large plantation and [slaves] are the goals of every Southern gentleman's ambition. For this the lawyer pores over his dusty tomes, the merchant measures his tape, the doctor rolls his pills, the editor drives his quill, and the mechanic his plane—all, all who dare aspire at all, look to this as the goal of their ambition. The mind is used, from childhood, to contemplate it, and the first efforts are all lost if the objects in life should be changed. The mind is thus trained from infancy to think of and prepare for the attainment of this end.

Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin

In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the **cotton gin**, a simple and inexpensive machine that mechanically separated cotton fiber from cotton seeds. Two years later, a slave mechanic in Natchez named Barclay was given a verbal description and a drawing of Whitney's machine. From such information, this slave craftsman built a workable model of the most important machine in southern history.

The major value of the mechanical method of separating lint from seed was the fact that one machine could do the work of many hands. The slaves who had been performing that slow and tedious job were free to work in the fields growing more cotton.

Below: An early model of Eli Whitney's cotton gin.



Something Extra!

Eli Whitney (above) developed the concept of mass production of interchangeable parts that is used today. In 1801, he fulfilled a government contract for 10,000 muskets.

Earlier, a complete musket would have been made by one person.

Whitney designed machine tools that allowed an unskilled workman to make one part that would fit any musket of that design.

Figure 9 1859 Cotton Production

State	400-Pound Bales	County	400-Pound Bales
Mississippi	1,202,507	Yazoo	64,057
Alabama	989,955	Hinds	54,685
Louisiana	777,738	Madison	51,327
Georgia	701,840	Lowndes	51,234
Texas	431,463	Noxubee	50,096



Above: The invention of the cotton gin and the development of Mexican-Petit Gulf cotton spurred a rapid increase in the amount of cotton being produced. Soon, more cotton was being grown than any other crop in Mississippi, and the plantation system necessary for its cultivation would have a profound influence on life in Mississippi.

Mexican-Petit Gulf Cotton

With an inexpensive method of ginning available, the only other thing necessary to make cotton the state's major cash crop was the development of a type of cotton that would grow well in Mississippi. It had been known for several years that Mexican cotton would grow in Mississippi's damp climate, but Mexican officials had forbidden the exportation of Mexican cotton seeds. In 1806, a Natchez planter named Walter Burling visited Mexico. He purchased several dolls, stuffed them with cotton seed, and brought them back to Natchez. Dr. Rush Nutt, a planter and scientist, developed the Mexican-Petit Gulf variety of cotton from the Mexican seeds that Burling had brought to Mississippi. The **Mexican-Petit Gulf seed** was ideally suited for Mississippi's climate.

Within a few years, cotton became the crown prince of Mississippi's agricultural economy by replacing tobacco, indigo, and *hemp* (a fiber used for making rope) as the state's chief crop. By the 1850s, the magical white fiber had become King Cotton, and Mississippi—the leading cotton-producing state in the nation—had become the Heartland of the Cotton Kingdom.

The Cotton Economy

The plantation system and the cotton economy dominated almost every aspect of life in antebellum Mississippi. Social and political affairs were often determined by the planting and picking seasons. School terms were determined by harvest times. As late as the 1940s, public schools in Mississippi were "let out" for several days in the fall so the students and teachers could pick cotton.

Something Extra!

Today, a standard bale of cotton weighs about 500 pounds.



Large Planters

The large planters were a small minority of Mississippi's antebellum population, but they dominated the state economically and socially. Although there are no precise figures that historians agree upon, slave holders who owned fifty or more slaves and farmed at least five hundred acres of land would be considered large planters. In 1860, only fifty-nine Mississippi slave holders owned more than two hundred slaves, and only fourteen owned more than five hundred. These landed aristocrats were popularized in movies and novels like *Gone With The Wind* and have become symbols of the Old South. Most of the large planters were Whigs, who tried to keep the controversy over slavery to a minimum. They realized that continued agitation over slavery could eventually lead to secession and even war. They believed that a war between the North and the South would result in the defeat of the South and the abolition of slavery.

Small Planters

The small planters owned between twenty and fifty slaves and farmed between two hundred and five hundred acres. These planters were ambitious and anxious to increase their land holdings and slaves. They hoped to achieve the wealth and prestige of the large planters. Many of the small planters were Democrats, who saw the abolitionist movement as a threat to their hopes and dreams of becoming wealthy landowners. They supported the expansion of slavery into the new western territories. The acquisition

Above: Cotton made Mississippi one of the wealthiest places in the country, and the biggest planters liked to display their wealth in the houses they built. The height of this extravagance was Longwood in Natchez, built by Haller Nutt, and also known as "Nutt's Folly." Construction began in 1859, but was interrupted by the Civil War, and the interior was never completed. It is the largest octagonal house in the United States.



Above: The Huffman cabin was built in 1840, and is characteristic of the type of dwelling a small farmer might have lived in. It is a dogtrot cabin, with two large rooms separated by an open passageway, or dogtrot. The dogtrot helped keep the cabin cool by allowing a breeze to pass through.

of additional slave territory would make it possible for the small planters to sell their surplus slaves and would enable them to acquire more land when they ran out of land in Mississippi.

Farmers

The largest group of slave owners in Mississippi were the small farmers who owned fewer than twenty slaves and farmed less than two hundred acres. Like the small planters, they had aspirations of becoming landed aristocrats. They also favored the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Because of their numbers, they were a powerful political force in the state during the 1850s. They supplied momentum for the secession movement because they believed that slavery would be abolished in the Union as soon as the free states gained control of the federal government. The abolition of slavery would dash their hopes and dreams of becoming wealthy planters.

Education in the Cotton Kingdom

Most school-age children in antebellum Mississippi lived on farms widely scattered throughout the state. Because farming required little formal education, there was practically no demand for a public school system. The planter class hired **tutors** (private teachers) for their children and sent them to colleges in the Northeast or in Europe. There were several private academies throughout the state, and some of the larger towns like Jackson, Natchez, Woodville, Vicksburg, and Columbus had public schools.

Limited Educational Opportunities for Women

In antebellum Mississippi, there were several private schools for girls, but there were no state-supported colleges for women. The prevailing attitude toward women in the Cotton Kingdom was that a woman's place was in the home to serve the needs of her husband and children. Women could

not vote or hold public office. Most ministers, politicians, and other public officials believed that women were not endowed with the intellectual capacity “to comprehend as the male” and that a formal education was not necessary for young women. In 1856, that theory was challenged in an historic educational document written by Sallie Reneau, which she presented to the state legislature.

Prohibited Educational Opportunities for Slaves and Free Blacks

There were no public or private institutions in antebellum Mississippi that provided education to its slave population or to free blacks. Mississippi was the only southern state that reported no free black children in school in 1850. There was a school for “children of color” conducted for a brief period in Natchez by Thomas Jones. But the school was closed after Jones was arrested for furnishing a pass to a slave. Although there was a state law prohibiting the education of slaves, some slaves and free blacks did acquire the rudiments of an education.

Sixteenth Section Funds

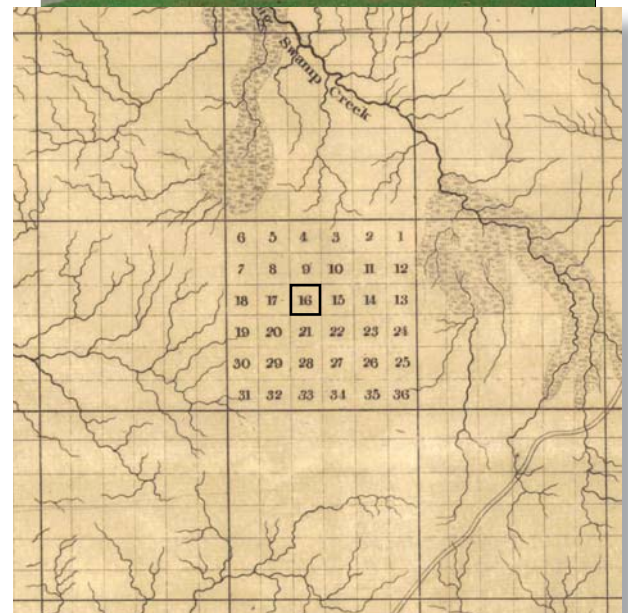
In 1798, the Mississippi Territory was surveyed and divided into townships, which were subdivided into sections. A **section** is 640 acres, and there are 36 sections, which are numbered from 1 to 36, in each township. The income from the lease of every sixteenth section in the township is called **sixteenth section funds** and is used to support public schools in the county where the sixteenth section is located. Franklin Academy, established at Columbus in 1821, was the first public school that was supported by revenue from sixteenth section lands. The Academy had an enrollment of four hundred in 1840.

Chickasaw School Funds

The Chickasaw Cession of 1832 was not divided into townships and sections, so the federal government set aside 174,500 acres to be used in the same manner as the sixteenth section lands. Only the counties established within the Chickasaw Cession received **Chickasaw school funds** from the lease of the Chickasaw school lands.

The University of Mississippi

When Mississippi became a state, the U.S. Congress granted a township of land to the state for the purpose of supporting a university. After years of disagreement over where to locate it, the legislature finally established a state university in 1844. By a margin of one vote, the university was located at Oxford rather than Mississippi City, a town on the Gulf Coast. William



Above: This detail of an 1818 map shows a township grid, divided into 36 sections. The income from the lease of the sixteenth section was used to support public schools in each county.

Top: Franklin Academy in Columbus was the first school to be funded with sixteenth section revenue. It exists today as Franklin Academy Medical Sciences and Wellness Magnet School.



Something Extra!

Lyceum is a Latin word that describes a hall for public lectures or discussions.

Nichols, the architect who had designed the state capitol and the governor's mansion, designed and built the university's first buildings. One of those original structures, the Lyceum, now serves as the university's administration building. The University of Mississippi opened in 1848.

Towns in Antebellum Mississippi

Although most antebellum Mississippians lived on plantations and farms, there were several towns and cities in the state. Columbus, Port Gibson, Rodney, Woodville, Pontotoc, Natchez, Grenada, Canton, Vicksburg, Jackson, and Corinth were among the largest towns. Population statistics indicate how slowly towns grew in antebellum Mississippi. In 1830, 98 percent of the people lived in rural areas. Thirty years later, the rural population was 97.4 percent.



Top: The Lyceum, designed by William Nichols, is the oldest building on The University of Mississippi campus. When completed in 1848, it was the only academic building on the campus. **Above:** This view of Natchez was painted by John James Audubon, who taught at Jefferson College in nearby Washington.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: plantation, cotton gin, sixteenth section funds.
2. How was Mexican-Petit Gulf seed developed?
3. How many slaves were owned and acres farmed by large planters, small planters, and farmers?

Of Special Interest

Sallie Reneau, 1837-1878

In 1856, Sallie Reneau persuaded the state legislature to charter a public college for women at Grenada. At the time she made that request, there were no state-supported colleges for women in the United States. This remarkable young woman was eighteen years old, a recent graduate of Holly Springs Female Academy, and a school-teacher when she wrote to the legislature.

Like the state university for men at Oxford, Sallie's state college for women would be funded by the proceeds from a federal land grant. But before the grant was secured, the nation was embroiled in Civil War. When the war began, Sallie organized the "Mississippi Nightingales . . . to nurse the sick and wounded soldiers." She asked Governor John J. Pettus to supply the nurses with suitable uniforms, and to pay them the same as soldiers. Sallie's effort to establish a wartime relief agency predated the Red Cross by several years, and her request for equal pay for the women volunteers was an early expression of a founding principle of feminism.

After the Civil War, Sallie Reneau persuaded the legislature to establish the Reneau Female University of Mississippi at Oxford as a coequal branch of The



Above: When she was only eighteen years old, Sallie Reneau persuaded the Mississippi legislature to establish a state-supported college for women.

University of Mississippi. Reneau Female University would provide instruction for women "on the same and equal privileges that the males have been and are now being taught." Again, Sallie's hopes and dreams were dashed when the legislature did not appropriate any funds to Reneau Female University. After the U.S. Congress declined to make another land grant to Mississippi, the legislature repealed the act establishing Reneau Female University. Reneau's crusade for the education and elevation of women was a remarkable story. What she had long envisioned was at last achieved in 1884 with the founding of Industrial Institute and College at Columbus, which

became Mississippi University for Women.

During the yellow fever epidemic of 1878, Sallie organized a small band of ladies to nurse the sick and dying. She too fell victim to that dreaded disease, and her obituary in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* speaks eloquently of this truly remarkable woman:

A woman of great mental endowments and rare intellectual attainments, she . . . laid down her life for her friends and neighbors. Verily, Death loves a shining mark.

Section 2

Chattel Slavery

Below: This collage, titled *Hauling the Whole Weeks Picking*, was created by William Henry Brown while on a visit to the Nitta Yuma cotton plantation north of Vicksburg in 1842. **Opposite page:** The first shipment of Africans, brought by English slave traders, arrived at the Jamestown colony in 1619. The importation of slaves was prohibited in 1808, but the law was not strongly enforced.

As you read, look for

- the origins of slavery;
- the types of slave workers;
- how slaves were controlled;
- the family and religious lives of slaves;
- the restricted lives of "free men of color";
- methods of resistance by slaves;
- terms: **chattel slavery, overseer, driver, slave quarters, slave codes, praise meeting, American Colonization Society.**



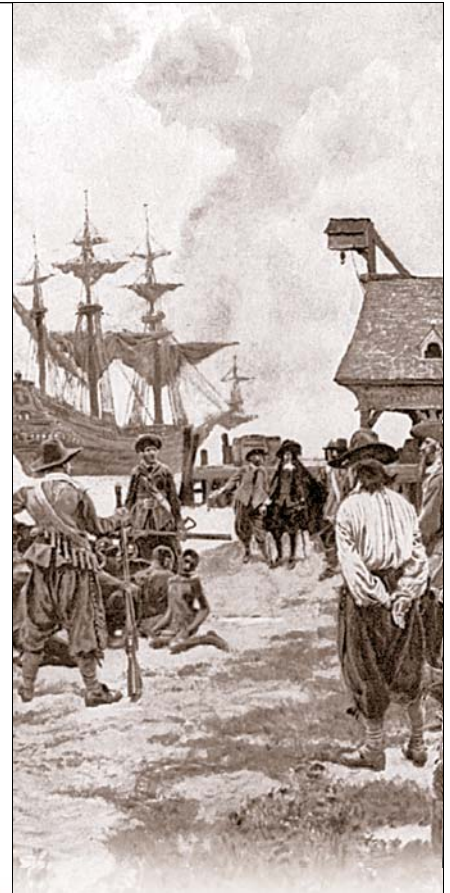
Mississippi's Constitution of 1817 established a labor system called chattel slavery. **Chattel slavery** means that, by law and custom, African American slaves were the personal property of their owners. Like any other personal property, slaves could be bought, sold, traded, and inherited.

The civil rights movement renewed America's interest in slavery, and historians began to reexamine the "peculiar institution." Hundreds of books about slavery and race relations have been written in the last fifty years. Americans in the 1950s, like their ancestors in the 1850s, responded to racial changes with emotional intensity. Across that century, slavery cast its long shadow, and Americans repeated, with some modifications, many of the old arguments. We will study the civil rights movement in Chapter 10.

It is difficult for Americans, especially southerners, both black and white, to study slavery without experiencing the emotion that this part of our past provokes. But slavery was an important part of our history, and we must understand the institution that influenced American history, and even now affects all of us.

Origin of Slavery

In the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the tradition of human *bondage* (captivity, servitude) was well established. When Europeans came to the New World, they brought the institution of slavery with them. In 1619, English slave traders brought the first African Americans to the English colony at Jamestown, Virginia, and sold them as "servants for life."





Above: An auction was a time of great anxiety for a slave. It could mean separation from family, or a new life with a hard taskmaster.

When French settlers began tilling the southern soil in the lower Mississippi valley, they used Indian slaves as well as African slaves. Gradually, black slaves became the primary labor force, and both the Spanish and the English governments perpetuated slavery. When America acquired the territory that would become Mississippi, slavery already existed in that area, and the United States allowed it to continue.

Increase in Slave Population

Until the 1830s, slaves comprised a minority of Mississippi's population. During the Flush Times of the 1830s, when millions of acres of forests were turned into cotton fields, the black population soared. By 1840, slaves outnumbered whites by 195,211 to 179,074. Over the next 20 years, the slave population continued to grow at a faster rate than the white. In 1860, there were 436,631 slaves and 353,901 whites in Mississippi.

Slave Owners

According to the most reliable figures available, 30,943 Mississippians were slave owners. The average antebellum Mississippi family consisted of 5.7 persons, which means that approximately 176,375 whites belonged to the slave-owning class. In 1860, less than half of the white people in Mississippi were members of families that owned slaves.

Types of Slaves

There were three types of slaves in antebellum Mississippi: field slaves, house slaves, and town slaves. The individual lives of slaves were largely

determined by their status as field hand, domestic servant, or town slave. Field slaves who worked directly under the supervision of their owners were usually treated better than those under the control of an **overseer** (a white man who acted as manager of the slaves and the farming operation) or another slave.

Field Slaves

The largest group were the field slaves, which included both men and women. Children were brought into the labor force when they were five or six years old. Slave children sowed the seeds, carried water, chopped cotton, and performed other tasks that did not require strength and endurance.

Field slaves worked ten to twelve hours a day, five-and-a-half days a week, and produced five to seven bales of cotton a year. Field hands were divided into small groups and were assigned specific jobs. They were usually under the direct control of another slave called the **driver**. In addition to cotton, Mississippi plantations produced large corn crops. When the corn crop was harvested, field hands, both young and old, spent several days shucking corn. Sometimes slaves from one plantation would go to a neighboring plantation to help in the shucking process. Those occasions often took on a festive atmosphere, and plantation security was somewhat relaxed during the harvest season. In the off-season between harvesting and planting, field slaves repaired fences and barns and performed other similar chores.



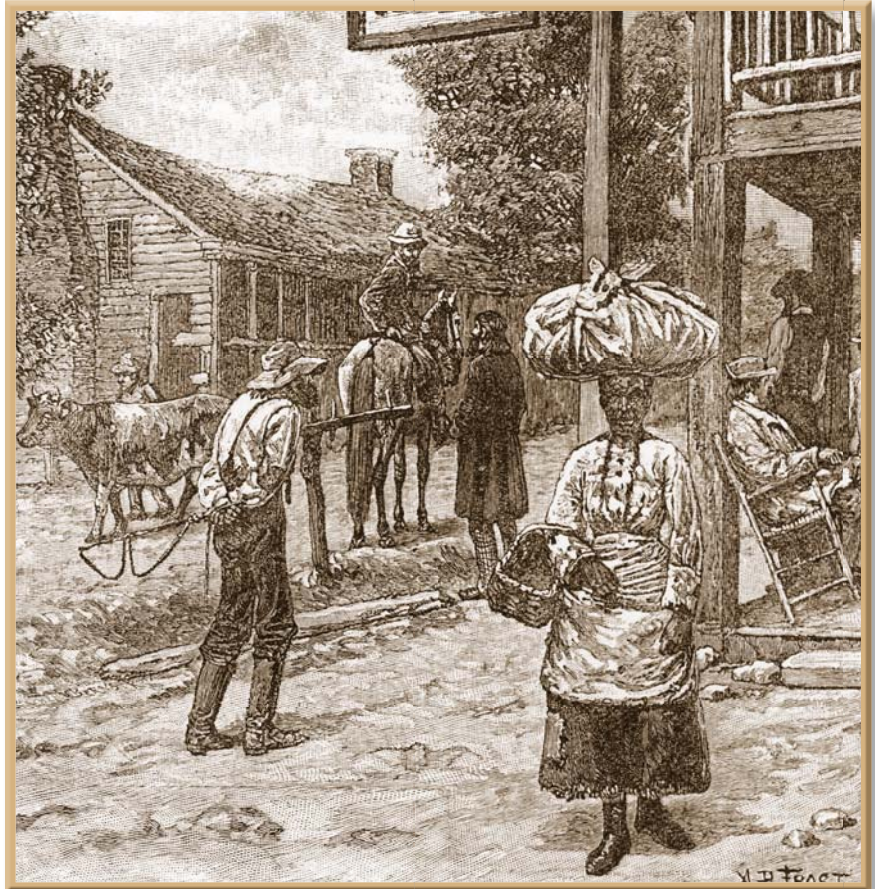
Above and opposite page: Working from dawn to dusk during the harvest, field slaves had the hardest lives of all slaves. Below: Town slaves were often house servants or skilled craftsmen.

House Slaves

The second type of slave was the house slave. This category included cooks, housekeepers, butlers, gardeners, carriage drivers, and traveling companions. House slaves were often given special treatment and privileges that were not available to field hands. They ate better food, wore better clothing, and did not work as hard as field hands. House slaves were sometimes resented by field slaves because of the favored treatment they received from their owners.

Town Slaves

The smallest of the three groups of slaves in Mississippi were those who lived in towns and cities. Town slaves performed a variety of jobs for their owners. Some were bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, or day laborers. Other town slaves



were cooks and butlers or worked in bathhouses and hotels. Most town slaves lived in a small enclosed section of town called the **slave quarters** rather than in the houses of their owners.

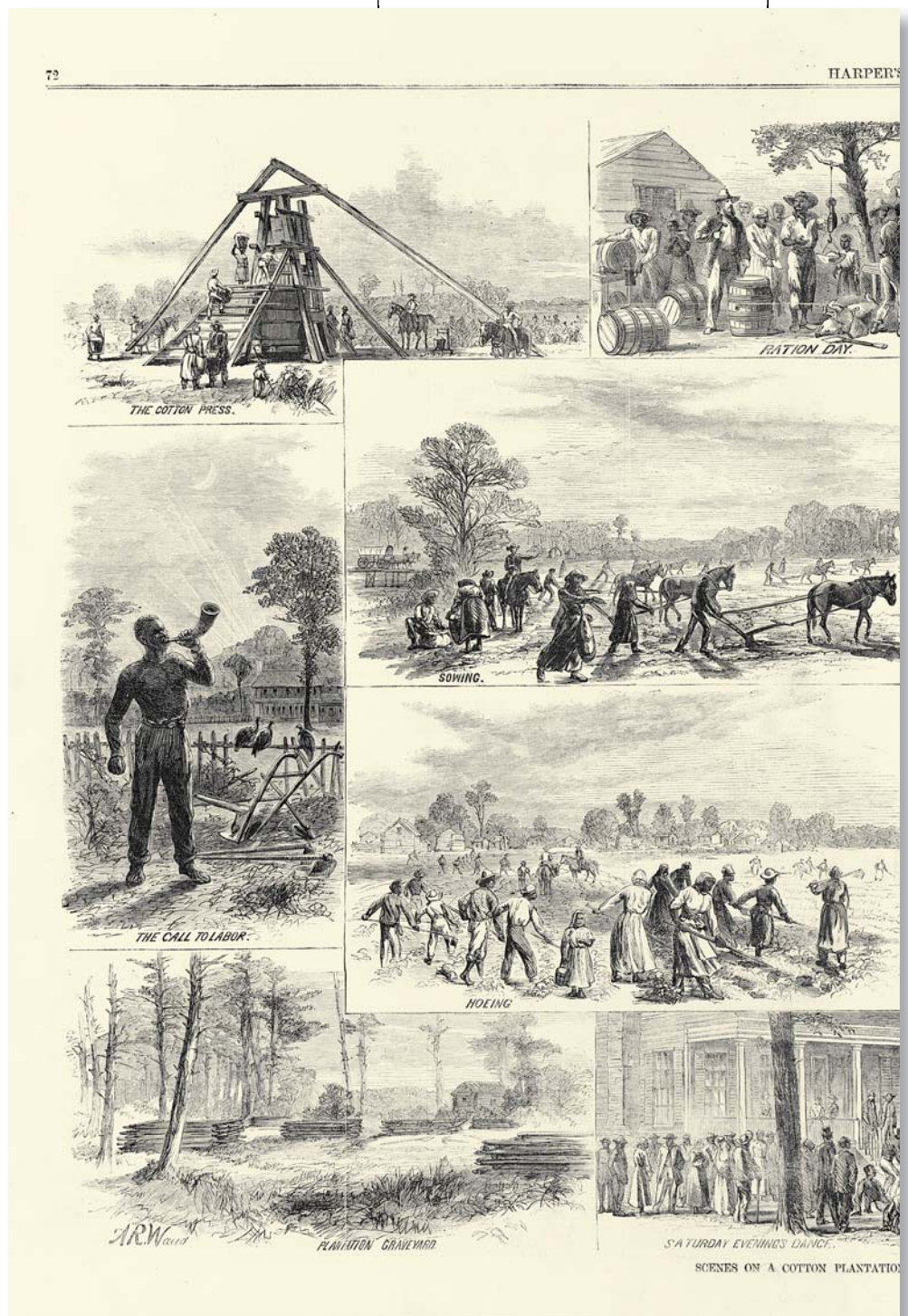
Every evening at the sound of some signal, usually a bell or a horn, town slaves were required to go to their quarters within the enclosed areas. At dark, the gates were locked for the night. Town slaves were usually hired out or rented by their owners. A portion of their wages was kept by the slaves to pay for their food, clothing, and shelter. The remainder of their wages was kept by the owners. Some industrious town slaves saved enough money to purchase their own freedom and the freedom of their families.

Plantation Management and Police Control

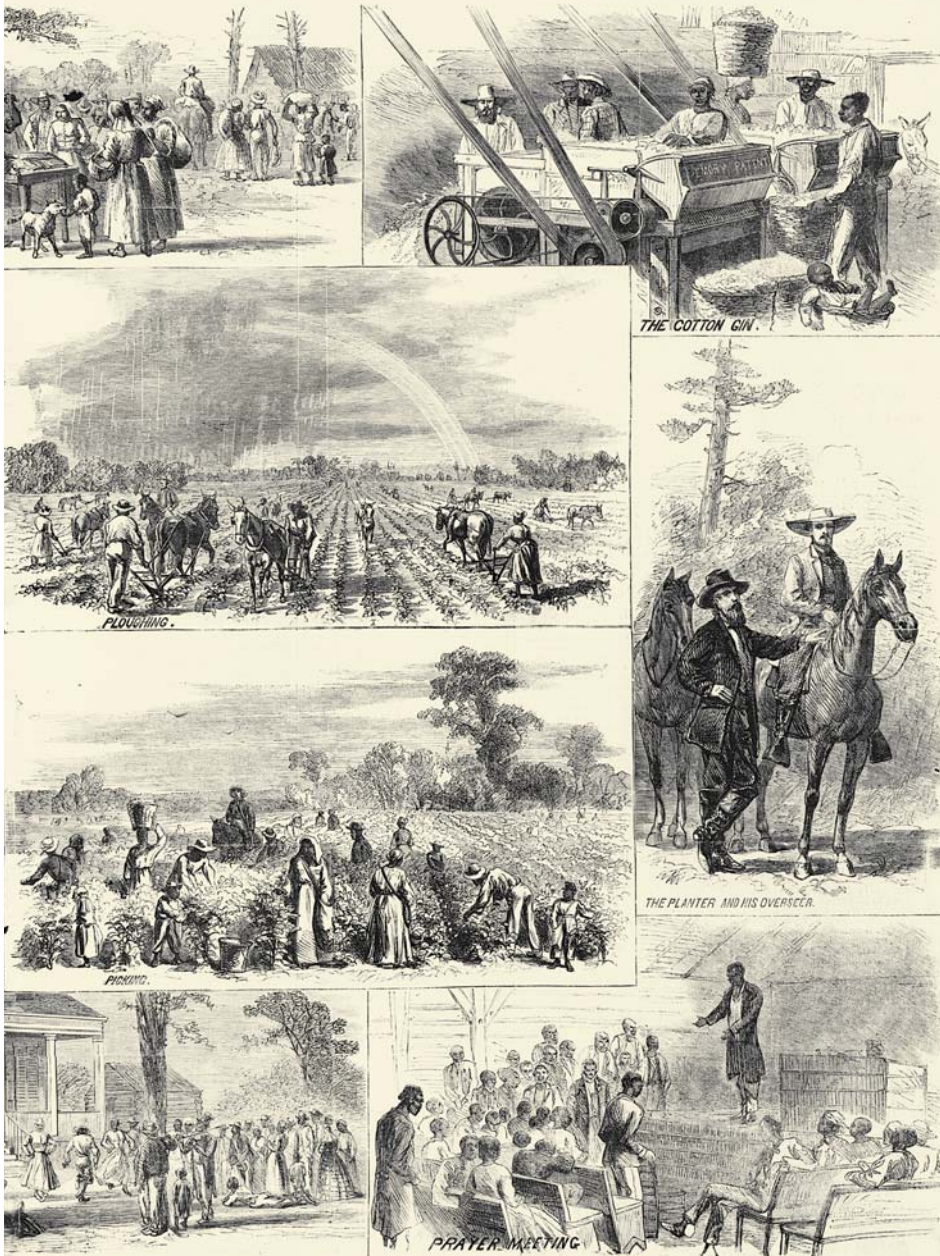
Planters who owned more than thirty slaves usually employed an overseer. Smaller planters managed their farms themselves. The overseer enforced the **slave codes** (state laws regulating slavery) and exercised almost complete control over the plantation and the lives of the slaves under his authority.

Slaves who left their plantations for an extended period of time were required by law to carry a written pass stating the purpose of their trip, where they were going, and how long they would stay. In order to sell or buy any item, slaves were also required to have written permission specifying the item they were buying or selling. The slave codes prohibited owners from teaching their slaves to read and write. The Mississippi countryside was patrolled at night to guard against runaway slaves. All able-bodied white men were required to serve a certain number of nights each year on these patrols.

Slaves who were charged with serious crimes were given a trial by jury, but slaves could not testify against whites in court. When convicted of a



Above and opposite page: This two-page spread, "Scenes on a Cotton Plantation," is from *Harper's Weekly*, a popular illustrated newspaper published from 1857 to 1916. The central four panels of the spread depict the four stages in the cultivation of cotton.



SKETCHED BY A. R. WADE.—[SEE PAGE 69.]

Something Extra!

One section of an 1822 Mississippi slave code "forbids a slave keeping a dog, under penalty of twenty-five stripes; and requires any master who permits it to pay a fine of \$5, and make good all damages done by such dog."

crime or charged with breaking the rules of their plantation, slaves were usually punished by a certain number of lashes with a leather whip. If a slave was convicted of a capital offense and was executed, the state paid the slave owner the market value of his slave. Slaves were rarely executed, however. They were usually sold to some distant place, often in South America. The slave codes made slave owners accountable for cruel treatment of slaves. Criminal charges, however, were rarely ever brought against whites for ill-treatment of their slaves.

There was a clearly defined reward and punishment system on most Mississippi plantations. Whipping, withholding of rations, and withholding of visiting privileges to towns or other plantations were the most common forms of punishment. Extra rations, special visiting privileges, new clothing, hunting and fishing rights, and repairs to their quarters were among the rewards given to slaves. These privileges were awarded to slaves for exceeding their work quotas, for good behavior, or for performing some unusual service that came to the attention of the overseer or owner.

Around the central panels are scenes from daily life on the plantation: work, in the form of the cotton press and cotton gin, and the call to labor; food, distributed on rations day; play, at the Saturday evening dance; and worship, at a prayer meeting.



Above: Families of slaves lived together in the slave quarters of the plantation, creating a community that formed lasting bonds, and maintained a strong cultural identity within the white world that controlled them.

The Slave Family

One of the most remarkable aspects of slavery in the American South was the fact that the great majority of slaves lived in family units. Recent scholarship has shown that the family unit was the primary group relationship. When family members were separated by the sale of one of the parents, the slave parent who remained with the children continued, whenever possible, to maintain the family structure. Family ties and blood kinship were very important to slaves, and they made every effort to keep the family intact. The reason that slaves most frequently gave for running away was to rejoin members of their family who had been sold away.

Although slave marriages and parentage were not legally valid, most slave owners not only permitted but encouraged the development of family relationships. On almost all Mississippi plantations, food, clothing, and other provisions were distributed to families, and the slave quarters on most plantations were designed for family-size occupancy.

The slave family and larger black community in the slave quarters was the primary environment for the majority of Mississippi slaves. Their values, ideals, morals, and self-image were shaped and molded there. Within the framework of the family, slave parents were able to cushion the shock of bondage for their children. Parents provided a frame of reference that enabled children to develop self-esteem and a positive self-concept.

The white world, dominated by values and customs very different from their own, was the slave's secondary environment. Although every facet of their lives was regulated while in the white man's world, slaves actually spent more time in the protected environment of the quarters. Mississippi slaves did not give up their humanity and dignity because they were slaves. They endured their bondage by developing a status system according to their own values. Slaves did not judge each other by how they lived in the white man's world where they had no freedom of choice. They judged each other by how they lived and behaved within the slave community, and in accordance with their own system of values.

Religion among the Slaves

Next to the family, religion was the most important feature of slave life in the quarters. A deep faith and hope of deliverance sustained the slaves during their long years of bondage. On most plantations, slaves went to church with the white people. Then, after formal services in the white church, slaves usually conducted their own religious ceremonies called **praise meetings**. Those activities took place in the quarters and were attended only by the slaves.

In the praise meetings, slaves were free to express their innermost feelings through their songs, chants, spirituals, and dances—many of which were African in origin. Slaves were unrestrained at those times. They often acted out their deepest anxieties, frustrations, and anger in tribal dances, accompanied by the rhythmic chanting and clapping of other slaves. These ceremonies were an escape for slaves and enabled them to “let off steam” that might otherwise have been expressed in some form of violence. These religious activities also enabled slaves to preserve some of the cultural features of their African heritage.

The Mississippi Colonization Society

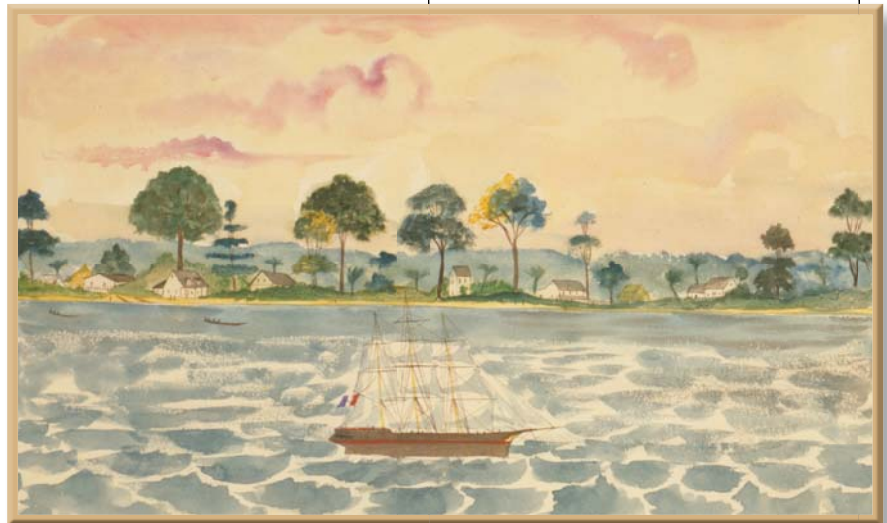
In 1831, a branch of the **American Colonization Society** was established in Mississippi. The purpose of this society was to assist free blacks who desired to return to Africa. The Mississippi Society provided assistance to 571 free blacks who emigrated from Mississippi to Liberia, a west African country founded by the American Colonization Society.

Free Men of Color

In 1860, there were 773 African American men, women, and children in Mississippi who were not slaves. They were designated by law and custom as “free men of color,” but their rights and privileges were severely limited.

Something Extra!

The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816 by Robert Finley, a Presbyterian minister. He was aided by some of America's most influential men—including Francis Scott Key, who wrote “The Star-Spangled Banner”; Henry Clay, the “Great Pacificator”; and Bushrod Washington, a nephew of George Washington.



Above: This watercolor painting depicts the port of Bassau in the African country of Liberia. Liberia was founded by the American Colonization Society with the aim of repatriating slaves to Africa.



Above: William Johnson was a free black, and a successful barber and businessman in Natchez, where his house still stands. Johnson's diary, "The Barber from Natchez," tells of the life of a free African American in the pre-Civil War South.

Something Extra!

Under the 1850 fugitive slave law, *fugitives* (runaways) could not testify on their own behalf and were not permitted a jury trial. Penalties were imposed on federal marshals who refused to enforce the law or from whom a fugitive escaped, and on individuals who helped slaves to escape.

Restrictions on Free Blacks

After a slave revolt led by Nat Turner in 1831, a Mississippi law required free blacks to leave the state. However, this law allowed free blacks who could secure good character references from local authorities to remain in the state. Free men of color who remained in the state were required to carry with them at all times a certificate identifying them as free men.

Most free blacks had been slaves at one time or were descendants of former slaves. Some had been freed by their owners, and others had saved enough money to purchase their freedom and the freedom of their families. The United States Census of 1840 listed 1,366 free men of color in Mississippi. That was the highest number of free blacks living in the state at any time before emancipation. Some white Mississippians were concerned that the presence of free blacks would create a desire for freedom among the slaves. Consequently, in 1842, the legislature passed a law prohibiting the immigration of additional free blacks into Mississippi. That legislation also made it illegal for a slave owner to free any of his slaves.

William Johnson

The most prominent free black in Mississippi was William Johnson, who owned several barbershops in Natchez and Vicksburg. Johnson also owned five houses, a delivery service, a thousand acres of land, and fifteen slaves. Johnson was one of the most successful businessmen in Natchez, and he sometimes loaned money to his white friends. In 1851, William Johnson was killed by a neighbor over a boundary dispute.

Runaways and Slave Resistance

Mississippi slaves were subjected to an almost total regulation of their lives from the time they were born to the time they died. Some slaves were subjected

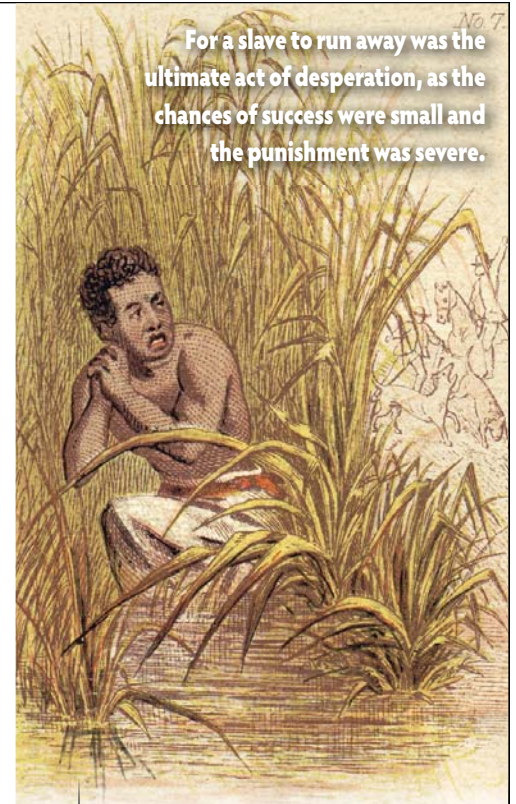
to cruel and inhumane punishment by their owners or overseers. To many African American slaves, that was unbearable, and they demonstrated their resistance in many different ways. The most direct means of expressing their resistance was to run away, but their chances of escaping were not very good, and punishment was swift and severe.

Slaves found many other ways of displaying their hatred for the system. They set fire to barns, fences, and houses. They neglected and abused farm animals and equipment. In some extreme cases, slaves even murdered their owners. Domestic servants were sometimes accused of poisoning their owner and his family. The certainty of severe punishment of slaves who were even suspected of violence may have discouraged more slaves from striking out against their white owners. It may also be a measure of their deep religious belief that a divine Providence would someday free them as He had freed the children of Israel, that slaves did not resort to violence more often than they did.

Rumors of Slave Revolts

In the summer of 1835, rumors of a slave revolt swept through the isolated plantations of Madison County and spread into the adjacent counties of Hinds and Warren. Any slaves or white strangers who acted suspiciously were taken into custody for questioning. By the end of the summer, approximately twelve whites and probably twice as many slaves were hanged by white mobs who were caught up in the hysteria of a possible slave insurrection. The 1822 Denmark Vesey Revolt in South Carolina and the 1831 Nat Turner Revolt in Virginia were still vivid memories in the minds of white Mississippians.

Just weeks after the Civil War began in the spring of 1861, rumors of a massive slave revolt in the Natchez area spread through both the black and the white communities. The response to those rumors by white authorities was swift and severe. Any slave who was thought to be involved in the revolt was immediately arrested and quickly tried. Within weeks after the discovery of the conspiracy, at least forty slaves were hanged for their involvement in the planned rebellion. Throughout the Civil War, there were sporadic and isolated slave uprisings in the South, but there was no organized massive rebellion among the four million African American slaves.



For a slave to run away was the ultimate act of desperation, as the chances of success were small and the punishment was severe.

Something Extra!

Believing that a solar eclipse was a sign to begin an *insurrection* (rebellion), Virginia slave Nat Turner, with seven fellow slaves, killed his owner's family on August 21, 1831. Other slaves rallied to his cause, but armed resistance from whites and the state militia ended the rebellion in a few days. Turner escaped capture for six weeks but was eventually caught, convicted, and hanged.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: chattel slavery, praise meeting, slave codes.
2. Why were house slaves sometimes resented by field slaves?
3. What were some of the ways slaves resisted their harsh treatment?

Section 3

Slavery, States' Rights, and Secession

Something Extra!

A January 2009 Gallup Poll found that 85 percent of Mississippians said that “religion is an important part of my daily life.” That was the highest percentage of any state in the Union.

As you read, look for

- the influence of ministers, politicians, and newspaper editors on Mississippians' thinking;
- how the perception of slavery changed over time;
- how the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 led to the secession of southern states;
- miscalculations as to where secession would lead;
- terms: **states' rights, natural rights, Ordinance of Secession.**

In the 1830s, the Deep South was greatly affected by a religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, and its influence lasted much longer in the South than in other parts of the country. The South is known as the “Bible Belt,” and Mississippi is called the “Buckle of the Bible Belt” because it is the most religious state in America.

In antebellum Mississippi, churches were characterized by their evangelistic *fervor* (intensity), and their acceptance of a literal translation of the scriptures. Mississippians perceived the eternal conflict between God and Satan as a larger dimension of their personal, human struggle. The conflict between good and evil in their own personal experience was a manifestation of that cosmic conflict that the scriptures so vividly described. To most Mississippians, there were no shades of good or evil. Something was either good or evil, right or wrong.

Sunday after Sunday, year after year, preachers warned Mississippians that God would reward the good and punish the wicked. Heaven or hell were the only alternatives, and mankind would be held directly and personally accountable for its actions. Over the years, they developed a habit of thinking that did not consider compromise and moderation a virtue. A man must stand up and be counted. To straddle the fence on any issue, whether it was religious or political, was a sign of weakness. Like Reuben Davis said in his creed, a man was either for you or he was against you.





Politicians and newspapers also influenced how antebellum Mississippians looked at their world. Politics brought a measure of excitement to the drudgery of their rural isolation. But politics and the strife of rival factions kept the people stirred up almost constantly. Most politicians exaggerated problems and oversimplified solutions. This was especially true during the months leading up to secession in 1861. Mississippi politicians warned the people that secession from the Union was the only way they could keep slavery legal and maintain the southern way of life. They also assured the people that the North would not go to war to keep the South in the Union. And, finally, they said a Southern Confederacy would “rival Rome in its palmy days.”

Newspaper editors did not offer a calm analysis of the great issues facing antebellum Mississippians. They sensationalized the issues, always took sides, and almost never saw anything good in the positions taken by the other side. Editors wrote with an air of authority and certainty that reinforced the prevailing attitude of good versus evil, or right versus wrong.

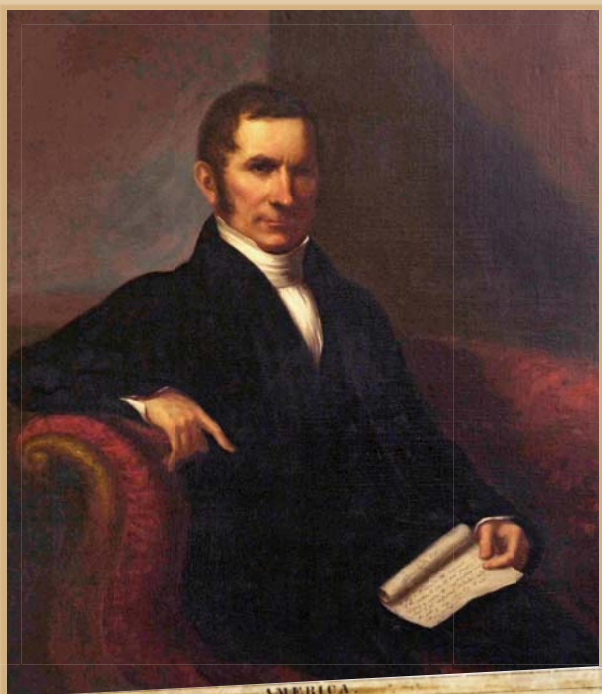
This thought pattern was clearly evident in Mississippi’s prevailing attitudes on sectional issues like the tariff, slavery, **states’ rights** (the principle that the rights of the individual states should prevail over the rights of the federal government), and secession. During the secession crisis in 1861, Mississippians were advised by their political, religious, and editorial leaders that they faced only one of two choices. They could either submit to the dictates of northern abolitionists, or they could secede from the Union and form a southern nation. To submit would have been unmanly, so they seceded.

Above: Camp meetings and revivals were popular events during the Second Great Awakening, especially in rural communities without churches.

Opposite page: The First Presbyterian Church in Port Gibson is famous for the 12-foot-tall golden hand on its steeple, pointing to Heaven.

Something Extra!

“Palmy days” refers to the Roman Empire during the height of its power and glory.



The Evolving Defense of Slavery

When Mississippi was admitted to statehood in 1817, most Mississippi whites considered slavery an evil system of labor that should be abolished. In 1818, the Mississippi Supreme Court stated that “Slavery is condemned by reason and the laws of nature.” In that same year, Mississippi Congressman George Poindexter declared, “It is not with us a matter of choice whether we will have slaves among us or not: we found them here, and we are obliged to maintain and employ them. It would be a blessing, could we get rid of them; but the wisest and best men among us have not been able to devise a plan for doing so.” However, as the plantation system and the cotton economy became increasingly the source of Mississippi’s prosperity, their attitudes toward slavery changed dramatically.

A “Necessary Evil”

The land boom of the 1830s prompted a significant change in the defense of slavery. During the Flush Times, when “cotton whitened the earth” and the number of slaves increased, Mississippians began to think of slavery as an unfortunate but necessary evil. A statement by Seargent S. Prentiss in 1831 illustrates the evolving defense of slavery. “That slavery is a great evil, there can be no doubt,” he wrote, “and it is an unfortunate circumstance that it was ever introduced into this, or any other country. At present, however, it is a necessary evil, and I do not think admits of a remedy.”

A “Positive Good”

In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison established an abolitionist newspaper called *The Liberator*. Week after week, Garrison published *inflammatory* (tending to excite anger) articles that not only condemned slavery as an evil system but condemned slave owners as evil men, and the slave-owning South as an evil society.

This new abolitionist rhetoric angered southerners and crystallized their defense of slavery. In 1836, the Mississippi legislature passed a resolution that enunciated the new southern position:

Resolved, That the people of the state of Mississippi look upon the institution of domestic slavery, as it exists among them, not as a curse, but a blessing, as the legitimate condition of the African race, as authorized both by the laws of God and the dictates of reason and philanthropy; and that they hope to transmit this institution to their posterity, as the best part of their inheritance.... We hold discussion upon this subject as equally impertinent with discussion



Top: George Poindexter was the second governor of Mississippi, serving from 1820 to 1822. **Above:** Proslavery propaganda like this attempted to demonstrate that slave owners cared only for the welfare of their slaves.

upon our relations, wives and children, and will allow no present change, or hope of future alteration in this matter.

Mississippi Senator Robert J. Walker went even further in *excoriating* (violently denouncing) abolitionists and northern politicians who attacked the institution of slavery. On the floor of the U.S. Senate, he proclaimed *bombastically* (loudly and arrogantly) and prophetically, “They may publish document after document, and print after print, but it will all be in vain and nugatory. They will not have made the slightest approach towards the grand object of all their efforts. No; our peculiar institutions will yield only at the point of a bayonet.”

In the Cotton Kingdom, Mississippians defended slavery not as an evil, not even as a necessary evil, but as a positive good. Whites justified slavery not only in economic terms, but in religious, philosophical, and racial terms. Ministers and politicians pointed out that slavery had existed in ancient civilizations and that the Apostle Paul seemed to have condoned slavery when he instructed Onesimus to return to his master Philemon and obey him. Teachers, editors, and other white leaders also justified slavery on the grounds that Africans were not as advanced in civilization and culture as white Americans.

Argument for Expansion into the Western Territories

The most intense element in the debate over slavery was not the morality of the institution, but the expansion of slavery into the western territories the United States had acquired after the Mexican War. Southerners argued that the restriction of slavery to the southern states would result in a large majority of slaves in proportion to whites. In the event of a race war, which many white southerners believed would someday occur, the minority of whites would be at a great disadvantage. Southern whites also feared that a large slave surplus would drive the price of slaves down and that they would lose their investment in slaves. In 1860, the total value of Mississippi’s 436,631 slaves was \$349,344,800, which was more than all the land, farm equipment, and livestock combined. Most white Mississippians believed that only by guaranteeing the right of slave owners to expand into the western territories could they protect their economic investment, provide for the safety and security of their families, and maintain their way of life.

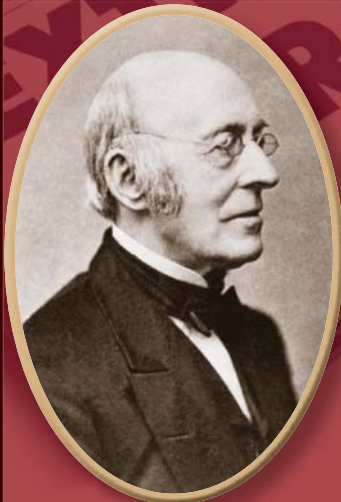
Contrasting Views in the North

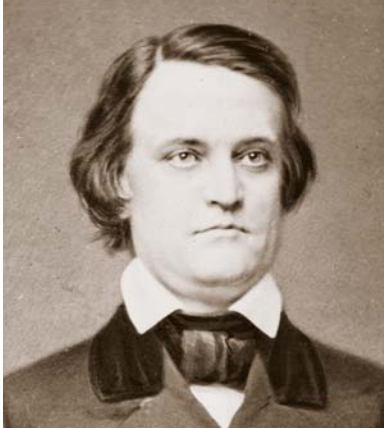
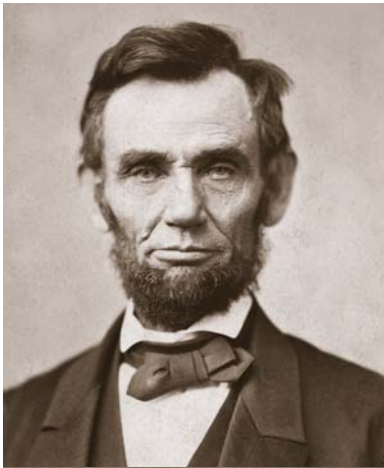
Although these racial theories were generally accepted throughout the western world in the nineteenth century, the American Revolution popularized the belief in natural rights. The theory of **natural rights** holds that all men, everywhere, are endowed by God and nature with the rights of life, liberty, and property. After the American Revolution, the belief in natural rights gradually led to a worldwide movement for the abolition of slavery.

After the American Revolution, northern states eventually abolished slavery. In the agricultural South, slavery was maintained and ultimately became the symbol and focus of the many differences between the northern and southern states.

Something Extra!

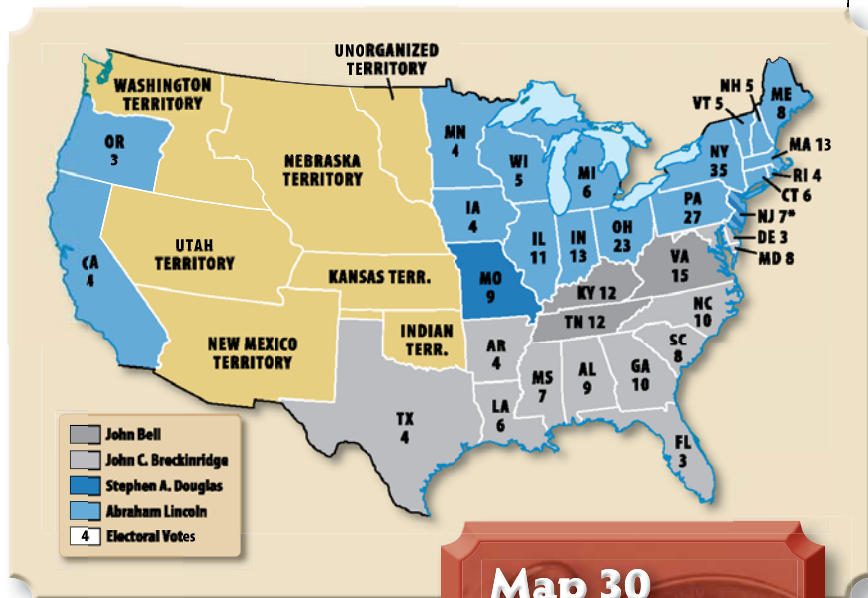
William Lloyd Garrison published *The Liberator* for thirty-five years. It was the most influential antislavery periodical in the pre-Civil War period.





Election of Abraham Lincoln, 1860

As the nation approached the 1860 presidential election, the relationship between the free states and the slave states reached the breaking point, and the traditional two-party system was splintered. The Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln on a platform that would prohibit the expansion of slavery into the western territories. The Northern Democrats nominated Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, and the Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. The remnants of the old Whig Party, now called the Constitutional Union Party, nominated John Bell of Tennessee. Although Lincoln received only 39.8 percent of the nation's popular vote, he won a majority of votes in the electoral college and was declared the duly elected president of the United States.



Mississippi Secedes from the Union

Many southerners predicted that the South would secede if Lincoln was elected. Within days after his election, the Mississippi legislature called for the election of delegates to a constitutional convention. The convention was authorized "to adopt such measures for the vindication of the sovereignty of the State and the protection of its institutions as shall appear to be demanded." The convention assembled on January 7, 1861, and was informed that South Carolina had already seceded. Two days later, the Mississippi Convention adopted an **Ordinance of Secession** by a vote of 84 to 15.

Mississippi based its secession on the theory of states' rights. Southern states had claimed for years that they had voluntarily entered the Union and they could voluntarily withdraw from it. The United States was a federal system of government. The original thirteen states had drafted the U.S. Constitu-

Map 30
The Election of 1860
 Map Skill: Which candidate did Mississippi support?

Something Extra!

Abraham Lincoln did not receive one vote in the South. He was not even on the ballot.

tion as a document of instructions to the federal government, and, under the Tenth Amendment, the states had retained their sovereignty.

Most Mississippians, including political and religious leaders and ordinary citizens, also believed that the North would allow the South to leave the Union peacefully. They did not believe that there would be a war to hold the Union together. Even if there was a war, southerners boasted that one Rebel could whip ten Yankees.

The most striking example of a southern leader who miscalculated the probability of a Civil War was Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus. In this regard, Governor Pettus is somewhat typical of many other southern politicians. Soon after Mississippi seceded, H. S. Fulkerson began corresponding with a small arms manufacturer in Brussels, Belgium. With some samples of the guns offered for sale by the Brussels firm, Fulkerson called on Governor Pettus and urged him to purchase a large supply before the Union blockaded southern ports. After firing several rounds “trying to hit an imaginary Yankee at long range,” Governor Pettus told Fulkerson that the purchase of arms would not be necessary. After assuring Fulkerson that there would be no Civil War, Governor Pettus launched into “one of his best bear stories.”

Within weeks after that meeting, Governor Pettus was frantically trying to raise an army. In the next chapter, we will study the Civil War in which approximately 600,000 Americans were killed.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: states' rights, natural rights, Ordinance of Secession.
2. How were newspaper editors able to affect the thinking of Mississippians regarding slavery?
3. What was the attitude toward slavery at the beginning of statehood?



Map 31 The Union and the Confederacy

Map Skill: Which states seceded before Fort Sumter?

Opposite page: There were four major candidates for president in 1860, top to bottom, Abraham Lincoln, Republican Party; Stephen A. Douglas, Northern Democratic Party; John C. Breckinridge, Southern Democratic Party; and John Bell, Constitutional Union Party. Lincoln won by taking the North and West Coast, while the other three split the South.

Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1 Heartland of the Cotton Kingdom

- After Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793, slaves were free to grow more cotton.
- Dr. Rush Nutt developed the Mexican-Petit Gulf cotton variety from seeds Walter Burling brought from Mexico.
- By the 1850s, cotton had replaced tobacco, indigo, and hemp as the state's chief crop.
- Aside from a few private academies, educational opportunities for Mississippi males were limited; planters hired tutors and sent sons away to college. Educational opportunities for women were extremely limited.
- State law prohibited educating slaves, but some black people got some education.
- Beginning in 1798, sixteenth section funds supported public schools.
- Counties in the Chickasaw Cession received funds from lease of Chickasaw school lands.
- In 1848, The University of Mississippi opened in Oxford.
- Antebellum Mississippi remained a rural state.

Section 2 Chattel Slavery

- Many ancient civilizations allowed slavery. The first African slaves were brought to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.
- Mississippi's slave population grew in the Flush Times; by 1840, slaves outnumbered whites.
- Three types of slaves were field slaves, house slaves, and town slaves.
- The plantation owner's overseer enforced slave codes.
- Slaves had to carry a pass outside the plantation, could not testify against whites, were often punished with lashes, and were less often executed or sold off. Their good behavior was sometimes

rewarded with privileges.

- Slave marriages were not legal, but family ties were important.
- Slaves attended church with white people but also had their own praise meetings.
- In 1831, a Mississippi branch of the American Colonization Society tried to help free blacks return to Africa.
- In 1842, a new law stopped any free blacks from entering the state and prohibited owners from freeing slaves.
- Successful businessman William Johnson was the most prominent free black in Mississippi.
- Forms of slave resistance included running away, setting fires, neglecting duties, murder, and revolting.
- South Carolina's Denmark Vesey Slave Revolt and Virginia's Nat Turner Revolt increased fear among white people.

Section 3 Slavery, States' Rights, and Secession

- The Second Great Awakening, an 1830s religious revival, encouraged absolute thinking.
- Politicians and journalists stirred people up and encouraged them toward secession.
- Slavery evolved from being considered an "evil" to a "necessary evil" to a "positive good."
- Southerners supported expansion of slavery into western territories so they could sell off slaves to lower their numbers and raise their prices.
- After the American Revolution, northern states began to abolish slavery.
- The Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln on a platform of prohibiting the western expansion of slavery. He won the 1860 election.
- Mississippi seceded from the Union in January of 1861, based on the theory of states' rights.
- Most southerners thought the Union would allow secession or that a war would end quickly.

Activities for Learning

Understanding the Facts

1. What was the ambition of most Mississippi gentlemen?
2. In addition to inventing the cotton gin, what manufacturing process did Eli Whitney develop?
3. Prior to the 1850s, what were the chief crops of Mississippi?
4. Describe the limited educational opportunities available to school-aged children, women, and slaves and free blacks in antebellum Mississippi.
5. In what decade did the slave population soar in Mississippi?
6. What jobs did town slaves perform?
7. What were the two most important aspects of a slave's life?
8. Describe the beliefs that characterized the Second Great Awakening.
9. What was the monetary value of Mississippi's slaves in 1860?
10. Give the names and party affiliations of the four major candidates in the 1860 presidential election.

Developing Critical Thinking

1. How did Mississippian views of slavery evolve during the antebellum period?
2. How did theory of natural rights conflict with Mississippian justifications of slavery?

Writing across the Curriculum

1. You have been hired by Eli Whitney to advertise the cotton gin in Mississippi. Research this invention and develop a pamphlet that includes an advertising slogan, the credentials

of the inventor, and the features and advantages of the cotton gin.

2. If you were a free black living in antebellum Mississippi, would you have accepted the Mississippi Colonization Society's assistance to return to Africa? Write a letter to the society explaining your decision.

Exploring Mississippi on the Internet

1. Go to <http://www.eliwhitney.org/new/museum/eli-whitney/cotton-gin>. View the animated cotton gin and read about this invention. What were the effects of this invention?
1. Go to <http://msgw.org/slaves/>. Read any two of the Mississippi slave narrative interviews. How were their experiences under slavery similar and different?

Building 21st-Century Skills: Understanding Cause and Effect

The connection between what happens and what makes it happen is known as the cause-effect relationship. A "cause" is a sufficient action for an event to occur. An "effect" is the result of this action. Not all cause-effect relationships are clear. Sometimes an event has more than one cause, or an action more than one effect. Written materials often provide a verbal road map to alert you to cause and effect. Look for words or phrases such as *because*, *consequently*, *gave rise to*, *produced*, *resulted in*, *so*, and *therefore*.

Study this example from the chapter: "Because farming required little formal education, there was practically no demand for a public school system." Then find two additional examples of cause-effect relationships in this chapter.