Chapter 2
Slavery and the Cotton Kingdom

With Southern expansion and spread of the Cotton Kingdom, the issue of slavery tragically separated the North and South. In this chapter, you will learn about the expansion of the cotton kingdom and about survival of slavery in the South. You'll also learn about the Missouri crisis ending in the Missouri Compromise which clearly showed how the issue of slavery could threaten the future of the Federal Union.

How the Cotton Kingdom Expanded

Expanding into the Southwest. The Cotton Kingdom spread westward from Virginia and the Carolinas to Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The majority of early settlers in these areas were from Virginia and the Carolinas. They knew how cotton planters were making a fortune, especially in South Carolina and Georgia. They too tried cultivating cotton. By the early 1800’s, the Cotton Kingdom had spread westward.

Growing in economic importance. After 1815, cotton became most important economically in the South. Investments in new cotton lands and slaves brought higher returns than anything else.

During the next few decades cotton was a crucial factor in the developing national market economy. It accounted for more than half of the country’s exports. As a result, it paid for a large part of its imports. The cotton plantations also provided an important market for manufactured goods from the Northeast.

Survival of Slavery in the South

General differences between the South and other areas. There were at least five overall differences between people in the South and those in other areas. First, few Southern farmers benefitted from improved transportation or became part of the national market economy. Second, wealth was not as evenly distributed in the South as it was elsewhere. Third, less money was invested in education in the South. Fourth, the rate of illiteracy was higher in the South than elsewhere. Illiteracy means inability to read and write well enough to function successfully in society. Fifth, fewer towns and local industries had developed in the South. In short, the Old South remained more rural and less diversified economically than the North. A greater proportion of its small farmers lived a life of isolation.
**Major difference between the South and other areas.** A major difference between the South and other areas was the survival of negro slavery in the South. Slaves had given the old South its identity. At the same time, they gave the white Southerners their feeling of separateness from the rest of the Union.

**Reasons for survival of slavery.** By the 19th Century, slavery had become a part of the Southern social climate. Also, most Southerners held the black slaves in low esteem. They thought blacks to be shiftless and untrustworthy. One major reason slavery survived there was that it was a way to control what Southerners thought to be an inferior race. Southerners thought slavery would prevent that race from becoming a burden on society. It would allow the white race to maintain supremacy.

Another major reason that slavery survived is that it was a profitable labor system. It represented a huge investment of Southern capital. Most slave owners earned good returns on their investments.

Missouri and the Issue of Slavery Expansion

**Events leading to the Missouri Compromise.** In time, slavery had a tragic impact on the whole nation. Certain events led to the Missouri Compromise which clearly pointed out how the issue of slavery could seriously threaten the Federal Union. First, slavery had been a topic of political debate for many years between the North and South. Southerners had obtained Congressional representation, for example, on 3/5 of their slaves. Also, antislavery Northerners represented the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Then, the issue of slavery became even more important with the steady march of slavery into the Southwest. More and more national political crises arose with the expansion of slavery and the cotton kingdom. In the early 19th Century 11 slave states and 11 free states were admitted to the Union, so balance was still present in the Senate. Next, however, balance in the Senate was upset; the territory of Missouri sought admission as a slave state. Following that request there was much serious debate. Much of the Missouri debate was about constitutional issues. Political advantages and sectional power played a big part in the conflict. Finally, a compromise was reached; the basic issue of slavery could not be settled through the debate.

**Aspects of the Missouri Compromise.** Agreement was reached on specific items in the Missouri Compromise. First, Congress finally agreed in 1820 to admit Missouri as a slave state. Second, Congress maintained balance by admitting Maine as a free state. Third, Congress divided the remaining territory acquired in the Louisiana Purchase along the line 36° 30' North Latitude. North of that line, except for Missouri, slavery was "forever prohibited." See Figure 2-1. Slavery was still permitted in the states south of that line.
Result. As a result of the Missouri crisis, Americans became quite worried about the future of the Federal Union. Never before had conflict between the North and the South seemed so great. Slavery had definitely disturbed the politics and had threatened the survival of the young republic. Such disturbance was apparent during this crisis.

Summary

By the early 19th Century the Cotton Kingdom had expanded into the Southwest. Those in the Southwest and those who moved to the Southwest acquired an identity separate from those in other areas. The major difference between the South and other areas was the continued presence of negro slavery in the South. Slavery survived there because it had become deeply rooted in the Southern social climate. Also, slavery was obviously a profitable labor system. Much political debate ensued between the North and South as territories were admitted into the Union. At first, balance was maintained between slave and free states. Balance was then threatened when Missouri sought admission as a slave state. This event resulted in the Missouri debate. The Missouri Compromise was finally reached. At the same time, tension clearly increased between the North and the South.