

Reading: Cotton Plantations in the United States

Cotton has been farmed for thousands of years. Cotton is mainly used for cloth. When Europeans landed in the New World, cotton was already growing on the Caribbean Islands. Cotton was becoming more widespread throughout the world by 1500, but it wasn't grown in the United States until 1556. Today cotton is grown by 20 million farmers across 80 countries and is considered the most important non-food crop.



When Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in **1793**, cotton farming grew quickly in the United States. The cotton gin allowed two enslaved laborers to separate the seeds from 50 pounds of cotton fiber in one day. This had previously been done by hand and a single enslaved laborer could only clean one pound of cotton in a day on average. This new technology helped make cotton the most popular cash crop of the United States in the South. By the 1830s, the United States was the biggest supplier of cotton in the world.



Growing cotton made cotton plantation owners very wealthy. A plantation was a large estate of land that grew one crop. The owner of the land was called the "planter". The difference between a planter and a farmer was that planter owned many slaves. Cotton was in high demand and a profitable cash crop. The reason cotton was so profitable is because these plantations used slaves to farm the cotton. These slaves, mostly from Africa, were kidnapped and brought to the Americas against their will to work on plantations.

Slavery in the southern United States was a main reason for the Civil War.