

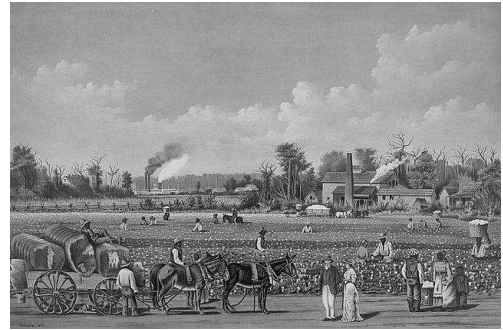
## **Southern Plantations**

*In the Antebellum South, wealthy planters owned large estates known as plantations. What was life like on these estates?*

In the Old South, status was measured by how much land and how many slaves a person owned. The largest plantations often covered several thousand acres. Overall, only 4 percent of white Southerners were plantation owners, meaning their family owned 20 or more slaves.

Each year, a plantation owner had to account for fixed costs or regular yearly expenses. These costs included housing and feeding workers and the maintaining of equipment. While these prices remained relatively consistent, cotton prices could fluctuate wildly.

Harvested cotton was typically transferred to agents in cities such as New Orleans, Charleston, or Savannah. These agents could hold a crop for many months before selling it, as they waited for prices to rise. This meant that planters were often in debt because they did not receive payment until the crop was sold.



A planter's wife typically managed the house and any slaves who worked inside the home. These domestic slaves cooked, cleaned, served meals, and often helped raise their owner's children. Plantation wives also had the responsibility of supervising other aspects of the estate. It was common for planters to travel to survey land, serve in government, or deal with cotton agents. As a result, wives and children spent prolonged periods of time without their husbands and fathers present. Oftentimes, their closest neighbor could be several miles away.

In the Deep South, this isolation gave slave-owning families the feeling of being under siege. In counties along the lower Mississippi River, black Americans accounted for over 75 percent of the population. Whites in these areas lived in constant fear of slave uprisings. Slave codes were strictly enforced, and these laws required slaves to carry papers signed by their owners every time they left the plantation.

On larger estates, workers were divided into groups that were managed by drivers and overseers. This division of labor became so complex that some plantations resembled villages with their own localized economy.

*Words to watch for:*  
*antebellum fluctuate*  
*siege chauffeur*

The most well-developed properties had carpenters, masons, and blacksmiths. Most also had slaves who tended to livestock and others who served as personal servants and chauffeurs. Most slaves, however, spent the entire day planting, cultivating, and picking cotton. An overseer supervised the slaves who worked in the fields to ensure that daily quotas were met.

Since most plantations were isolated and far from any sizable community, travel was difficult and time-consuming. As a result, most plantations produced what they needed. They often had mills for grinding grain, warehouses to store harvests, smokehouses for preserving meat, and a large chicken coop. Aside from the owner's "Big House" and the slave quarters, some of the more elaborate estates also had a guest house and a separate kitchen building for preparing meals.

**Guided Reading:** *Fill in the blanks below to create complete sentences.*

1. Each year, a plantation owner had to account for \_\_\_\_\_ or regular yearly expenses.

2. While fixed costs remained fairly consistent, cotton prices could \_\_\_\_\_ wildly.

3. Cotton was typically transferred to \_\_\_\_\_ who worked in Southern cities.

4. These \_\_\_\_\_ slaves cooked, cleaned, served meals, and often helped raise their owner's children.

5. It was common for planters to travel to survey land, serve in \_\_\_\_\_, or to deal with cotton agents.

6. In the Deep South, this \_\_\_\_\_ gave slave owning families the feeling of being under siege.

7. Whites in the lower Mississippi River counties lived in constant fear of \_\_\_\_\_.

8. Slave codes required slaves to carry \_\_\_\_\_ signed by their owners when they left the plantation.

9. Some plantations resembled villages with their own localized \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Since most plantations were isolated and located far from any sizable community, travel was difficult and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Multiple Choice:** *Select the choice that completes the statement or answers the question.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ How was a person's wealth determined in the Old South?
  - a. by how much money they had in the bank
  - b. by how much money they had invested in the stock market
  - c. by how many properties and businesses they owned
  - d. by how much land and how many slaves they owned
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ In counties along the lower Mississippi River, African Americans accounted for what percentage of the population?
  - a. about 33 percent
  - b. about 50 percent
  - c. over 75 percent
  - d. over 90 percent
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ How did most slaves spend their time on Southern plantations?
  - a. most worked as domestic servants inside of the home
  - b. most tended to livestock or were personal servants
  - c. most had specialized skills and worked as a carpenter, mason, or blacksmith
  - d. most spent the entire day planting, cultivating, and picking cotton
  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ What was the purpose of a smokehouse?
  - a. it preserved crops until they could be shipped to market
  - b. it is where grain was processed
  - c. it preserved meat and prevented it from spoiling
  - d. it is where firewood was stored
  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following statements is an opinion?
  - a. In counties along the lower Mississippi River, black Americans accounted for over 75 percent of the population.
  - b. Wives and children spent prolonged periods of time without their husbands and fathers present.
  - c. Slave codes were strictly enforced.
  - d. Laws required slaves to carry papers signed by their owners when they left the plantation.

**Vocabulary:** *Match each word with its correct definition. Consider how the word is used in the lesson. This might help you define each term. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.*

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| a. antebellum | d. siege     |
| b. fluctuate  | e. chauffeur |
| c. domestic   |              |
6. \_\_\_\_\_ relating to the running of a home or family relations
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ a military operation in which enemy forces surround a town or building
  8. \_\_\_\_\_ rise and fall irregularly in number or amount
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ occurring or existing before the American Civil War
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ a person responsible for driving a private or rented automobile

**Summarize:** *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!*

- 1) Who typically managed a plantation home?
  
- 2) What percentage of white Southerners owned plantations?
  
- 3) When did a slave have to carry papers signed by their owner?
  
- 4) Where did cotton agents typically work out of?
  
- 5) Why were planters often in debt?
  
- 6) How big were the largest plantations?

*Summarize the role that each of the following played on a Southern plantation. Be sure to use complete sentences.*

- 7) Cotton agents:
  
- 8) Plantation wife:
  
- 9) Overseer:
  
- 10) Domestic slaves: