

Value of U.S. Cotton Exports



ECONOMICS FOCUS Trade and commerce have been vital to the American economy since the colonial era. Prior to the twentieth century, U.S. exports consisted primarily of raw materials and agricultural products.



As you read, keep in mind that U.S. cotton was grown exclusively in the southern states during the pre-Civil War era.

Cotton had little importance to the American economy during the colonial period. Cleaning cotton was a labor-intensive process that limited production. This changed in 1793 when Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. His new device efficiently removed seeds from the fiber. A single cotton gin could match the output of fifty people cleaning cotton by hand.

Because of Whitney's invention, American cotton production exploded in the 1800s. Cotton accounted for nearly two-thirds of all U.S. exports in the antebellum era. Large plantations covered the Deep South. Their owners made great profits exporting cotton to the North and to Europe. They called their cotton "white gold." It was the toil of others, however, that created this wealth. Planters used large numbers of slaves to cultivate their cotton crops. The pre-Civil War southern economy was built upon a foundation of cotton and slavery.

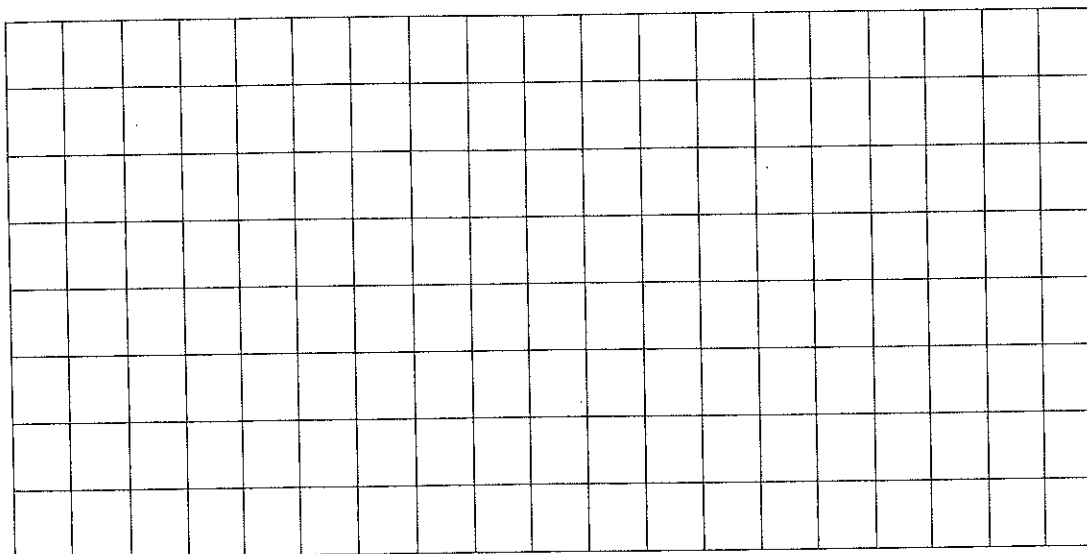
Great Britain was the world's leading textile producer in the 1800s. The cotton that drove England's booming industry was grown in the American South. In the 1850s, Britain imported 80 percent of its cotton from the United States. Southerners believed that cotton gave their region great diplomatic significance. They proudly proclaimed that "Cotton is King."

U.S. Cotton Exports, 1842–1861			
Year	Value (in millions of dollars)	Year	Value (in millions of dollars)
1842	48	1852	88
1843	49	1853	109
1844	54	1854	94
1845	52	1855	88
1846	43	1856	128
1847	53	1857	132
1848	62	1858	131
1849	66	1859	161
1850	72	1860	192
1851	112	1861	34

The Union in Crisis

Economics and History

Use the data from the table to create a line graph in the grid provided, with the year along the x-axis and the value of cotton exports along the y-axis. Then answer the questions that follow.



ANALYZING ECONOMIC DATA

1. Based on the graph, in what year was the value of U.S. cotton exports highest?

2. What was the average annual value of U.S. cotton exports in the period of 1842-1850? What was the average value of cotton exports in the period of 1851-1860?

3. In 1842 the U.S. exported 585 million pounds of cotton. In 1860 the U.S. exported 1,768 million pounds. What was the price per pound of cotton during each year?

4. Between which two years did the value of U.S. cotton exports drop by the greatest amount? What do you think caused that drop?

5. **Critical Thinking: Making Inferences** Based on the data shown in the table and chart, how do you think cotton affected southerners' opinions about secession in the years leading up to the Civil War?

