Threads of Change

Trace how cotton connected economic growth and demands for reform.

8.C.10 "Analyze the social and economic transformations of the early nineteenth century. Explain the impact of the Industrial Revolution on American culture and its economy..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three steps showing how cotton moved from Southern fields to Northern cloth sales, then number them in order. Circle two ways workers bore the costs of this growth.

From Cotton Fields to Cloth

1. In 1793, Eli Whitney's cotton gin made it much faster to remove seeds from short-staple cotton. As cotton became more profitable, planters across the South expanded their fields and demanded more enslaved labor. Enslaved people planted, picked, and packed cotton under threats of punishment. Laws called Slave Codes restricted their movement and rights. The gin did not spin cloth or end hard labor. Instead, it helped turn cotton into a crop that linked Southern plantations to growing markets in the North and overseas.

2. Northern merchants bought Southern cotton and sent it by ship, canal, and railroad to textile mills. Water-powered machines spun thread and wove cloth, helping towns such as Lowell, Massachusetts, grow into busy manufacturing centers. Young women formed much of Lowell's mill workforce. They earned wages, but long hours and strict rules led some to organize petitions and strikes for better conditions. A bolt of cloth sold by a Northern mill could bring income to its owners, even though its raw cotton came from enslaved workers who received no wages.

3. These linked economies also raised questions about who benefited and who had power. Abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass described slavery's violence and demanded its end, while the Underground Railroad helped some enslaved people escape. Women who organized for reform found that they, too, had limited political rights. At the 1848 Seneca Falls convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott helped present the Declaration of Sentiments, which demanded women's voting rights. Industrial growth created wealth, but reformers argued that prosperity did not excuse forced labor or unequal rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the cotton gin help expand slavery in the South?

2. How did Southern cotton contribute to the growth of Northern manufacturing centers?

3. Why did some women in Lowell organize petitions and strikes?

4. Why might abolitionists have challenged the idea that industrial growth benefited everyone?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum plans a display titled "Cotton Made Everyone Prosper." Write a 4- to 5-sentence replacement label that corrects this claim. Connect at least two economic details from the passage and explain whose labor or freedom the claim overlooks.

ANSWER KEY

Threads of Change

GRADE 8 · 8.C.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three steps showing how cotton moved from Southern fields to Northern cloth sales, then number them in order. Circle two ways workers bore the costs of this growth. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the cotton gin help expand slavery in the South?	**It made processing cotton faster and cotton more profitable, so planters expanded their fields and demanded more enslaved labor.**
2	How did Southern cotton contribute to the growth of Northern manufacturing centers?	**Merchants transported Southern cotton to Northern mills, where machines turned it into cloth and helped manufacturing towns grow.**
3	Why did some women in Lowell organize petitions and strikes?	**They sought better working conditions because mill jobs involved long hours and strict rules.**
4	Why might abolitionists have challenged the idea that industrial growth benefited everyone?	**Northern mills and Southern planters could earn money from cotton, while enslaved people produced it without wages and faced violence.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Cotton did not make everyone prosperous. The cotton gin increased planters' profits, and Northern mills earned money by turning Southern cotton into cloth. Enslaved workers grew that cotton without wages and lived under threats of punishment. Mill women earned wages, but their long hours and strict rules led some to demand change.

Accept other accurate links between Southern cotton and Northern mills. The museum label should challenge the claim with connected economic evidence and identify a cost borne by workers.