**Cotton Gin and Railroads**

**The Cotton Gin**

The cotton gin had an immense impact of Georgia’s economic and population growth, but this growth came with a terrible cost, the expansion of slavery. According to some, the idea for the cotton gin was conceived by Eli Whitney, a northerner who moved to Georgia in 1793. During this time period, tobacco, which at the time was one of Georgia’s most important crops, was destroying the soil. As an alternative to tobacco the state was looking for ways to make growing cotton profitable.

Until that point, cotton had to be, for a lack of a better word, “deseeded” by hand. This process took a long time to accomplish, and most farmers could not “clean” more than one pound of cotton a day. Eli Whitney “invented” a machine that was capable of removing the seeds from up to 50 pounds of cotton a day. Due to the machine’s efficiency the growth of cotton became profitable in Georgia and the rest of the South. This led to westward expansion as farmers began to seek out land capable of producing the crop. With the focus on growing cotton due to its profitability, the South grew a large majority of the world’s cotton by the end of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, there were two negative effects concerning the invention of the cotton gin. First, it made the South overly dependent on one crop. More importantly, due to the cotton gin’s effectiveness, slavery increased in Georgia and the Deep South. Due to cotton’s profitability, more slaves were needed in its production. This of course led to the South’s support and defense of the institution of slavery and later the Civil War.

**The Railroads**

Another important technological development that had a major impact on the state of Georgia was the invention of the railroad. Many of Georgia’s cities and towns were created due to the railroad, including the city of Atlanta. The first Georgia railroad was chartered in 1832. It was created in part by businessmen in Athens, who needed a better way to transport cotton to Augusta due to poor road conditions. In the 1840s and 1850s, railroads had spread across so much of the state that Georgia ranked in the top 10 for railroad track millage. Georgia had the most miles of track in the Deep South.

The city of Atlanta was created as a railroad hub for the Western and Atlantic Railroad. This track ran from Chattanooga, Tennessee to a small hub called “Terminus,” which means “end of the line.” Later, two other railroad lines combined with this point, causing the city to grow even more. Terminus changed its name in 1843, to Marthasville, and again in 1845 to Atlanta. Due to the invention of the railroad, Atlanta became the first major American city to be built on a location without a navigable river.

