

Name _____

The Cotton Kingdom

By Fredrick Law Olmsted

Let a man be absent from almost any part of the North twenty years, and he is struck, on his return, by what we may call the "improvements" which have been made. Better buildings, churches, school-houses, mills, railroads, etc. In New York City, alone, for instance, at least two hundred millions of dollars have been reinvested merely in an improved housing of the people; in labor-saving machinery, waterworks, gasworks, etc., and much more. It is not difficult to see where the profits of our manufacturers and merchants are. Again, go into the country, and there is no end of substantial proof of twenty years of agricultural prosperity, not alone in roads, canals, bridges, dwellings, barns and fences, but in books and furniture, and gardens, and pictures, and in the better dress and evidently higher education of the people. But where will the returning traveler see the accumulated cotton profits of twenty years in Mississippi? Ask the cotton-planter for them, and he will point in reply, not to dwellings, libraries, churches, school-houses, mills, railroads, or anything of the kind; he will point to his negroes--to almost nothing else. Negroes such as stood for five hundred dollars once, now represents thousand dollars. We must look then in Virginia and those Northern Slave States which have the monopoly of supplying negroes, for the real wealth which the sale of cotton has brought to the South. But where is the evidence of it? Where anything to compare with the evidence of accumulated profits to be seen in any Free State? If certain portions of Virginia have been a little improving, others unquestionably have been deteriorating, growing shabbier, more comfortless, less convenient. The total increase in wealth of the population during the last twenty years shows for almost nothing. One year's improvements of a Free State exceed it all.

Source: Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: mason Brothers, 1861), 12-13, 25-26.

1. According to the author, what types of improvements had New York City recently made? How much did this cost?

2. How was New York City able to afford this?

3. What types of improvements were made in the countryside of the North?
4. The majority of Southern wealth had been concentrated in what?
5. What has happened to some parts of Virginia? Why?
6. Make a Prediction to how this work is going to be received by Northern and Southern audiences. Explain your answer.