

Textile Capital (5th Grade)

Objective: Students will create a textile mill village map.

Essential Question: *What did an Upcountry textile mill village look like?*

SC Social Studies Standards

- 5-3.3 Explain the effects of immigration and urbanization on the American economy during the Industrial Revolution, including the role of immigrants in the work force and the growth of cities, the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy, and the rise of big business.
- 5-3.4 Explain how building cities and industries led to progressive reforms, including labor reforms, business reforms, and Prohibition.

Background Information

From the Museum:

Manufacturing Success

The Upcountry was an ideal spot to manufacture textiles. Its rivers provided waterpower that ran machines; its fields grew quality cotton; and its independent, non-union workers needed jobs. As labor problems plagued the northern textile industry, the South campaigned for industrialization. The state of South Carolina offered northern manufacturers, such as Seth Milliken and Dexter Edgar Converse, and southern investors, such as Henry Hammett and Ellison A. Smythe, just the right combination of power, cotton, and labor. These shrewd businessmen took the lead in constructing cotton textile mills in the Upcountry. The Upcountry mills boomed. Workers arrived, trading rural homesteads for company-owned mill villages. The area became home to some of the largest textile mills in America. They siphoned business away from the declining northern textile industry and defined the region's economy.

The Textile Capital

Greenville played host to a great textile exposition in 1915. Nearly 200 exhibitors filled a three-story warehouse, promoting local mills and mill machinery from across America. The success of the first show prompted Greenville civic leaders William F. Anderson, Bennett E. Geer, and William G. Sistine to construct a permanent exhibition space. Textile Hall was inaugurated with the opening of the second exposition in December 1917. The success of this national show prompted Greenville to claim the title "Textile Capital of the World." The city still held the show biannually until 2005.

Mill Owner's World

Mill owners knew how to promote their product to investors, and by the 1890s, textile mills became an established part of the scenery across the Upcountry. They enticed thousands from the Upcountry and across three states — Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee — to come to work in their mills. The paternalistic mill owners not only provided jobs, but they also offered housing in regimented, company-owned communities to workers, who were often desperate, disadvantaged, and destitute.

Working the Mill Floor

Textile mill work was a drastic change of pace for many, especially for farm families. Instead of responding to the cycles of nature, these new employees worked according to the mill owner's clock — their days started with the screech of steam whistles from mill towers. Inside the factories, men, women, and children worked in hot, lint-filled rooms, where machinery pounded endlessly. Before the enforcement of safety precautions, these workers risked their hearing, breathing, lives and limbs while they labored 10 to 14 hours a day, six days a week, year-round.

In the late 1920s, mills sought to increase profitability with the “stretch-out,” which forced workers to speed up to increase production during their already grueling 66-hour workweek. In 1933, the New Deal's Cotton Textile Code set a 40-hour workweek, a \$12 minimum weekly wage, and an end to child labor. Frustrated by these restrictions, mill owners employed the stretch-out even more aggressively as a way to increase production: if the government required more pay for fewer hours of work, mills would demand more output from their workers.

Prior to the stretch-out, mill workers had some control over the pace of their work; the stretch-out ended that. They could not leave their machines for a moment. The straining, speeding machines needed the worker's constant attention to complete what was demanded by the mills. In desperation, the usually union-resistant Upcountry mill workers turned to the United Textile Workers of America for assistance.

“Shoeless” Joe Jackson

Mill owners used mill sports teams to generate community spirit in the mill villages. One such team produced Joe Jackson, considered by many to be the greatest baseball player who ever played the game. Jackson had been working in Greenville's Brandon Mill for six or seven years when the mill's baseball team recruited the 13-year old in 1901. Jackson's abilities eventually took him to the big leagues, where he played for the Chicago White Sox. Accused in the 1919 “Black Sox” World Series Scandal, he was banned from baseball and certain selection to the Hall of Fame. To this day his supporters insist on his place in Cooperstown. A fan from an opposing team gave “Shoeless Joe” his nickname. Jackson, playing in socks after a new pair of spikes hurt his feet, hit a triple. As he ran the bases, the man hollered, “Oh you shoeless \$%*#!” A sportswriter overheard this, cleaned it up for publication, and dubbed him “Shoeless Joe.”

Coleman Blease

Coleman Blease was an outspoken politician from Newberry, South Carolina. During the early 1900s, he united the fastest-growing segment of the population — mill workers —

by appealing to their prejudices toward African Americans, townspeople, businessmen, and progressive reformers in Columbia. Blease began his political career as an ally of “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman, who had united the small farmers in their fears and prejudices. He was elected governor in 1910, and again in 1912, but hard-core opposition from business interests, who saw Blease turning the workers against them, resulted in repeated defeats over the next two decades. Blease again ran for governor in 1934. However, times had changed and mill workers were changing their attitudes, looking for Federal assistance rather than the “hands off” approach that Blease supported. Blease lost the election to New Deal-era progressive Olin D. Johnston.

Olin D. Johnston

Olin D. Johnston was a reformist politician during the tumultuous years of the Great Depression. He advocated an active role for the federal and state governments in helping victims of the Depression. Johnston was born on a farm near Honea Path, South Carolina. His parents were tenant farmers and later mill workers. By the time he was nine, Olin was also working in the mills. In 1923 at age 27, Johnston won a seat in the General Assembly. Then in 1934, he defeated Coleman Blease, his former political hero, to become governor during the worst of the Depression. Johnston fought for tax exemptions for small farms, increases in the minimum wage, a 40-hour workweek for textile workers, and improvements in education.

Upcountry Depression Blues

Several months before The Great Depression struck America in the fall of 1929, economic disaster struck the Upcountry: farms failed, banks closed, mills shut down. In the fall of 1929, economic disaster hit the Upcountry. Crop prices fell. One bank closed, and others threatened to follow. Overproduction and a drop in worldwide demand forced many textile mills out of business, while those remaining cut their output and their labor force. Thousands were out of work. The need of residents overwhelmed local relief efforts. The characteristically independent people of the Upcountry accepted federal recovery efforts, such as the New Deal’s National Recovery Act (NRA), which worked to combat widespread unemployment. Along with labor issues, the New Deal addressed racial issues. The NAACP formed to strengthen the African-American community and work toward receiving fair political representation. In response, the Upcountry saw a renewal of the Ku Klux Klan and racially motivated violence.

The Uprising of ’34

During the Depression, many workers found that the paternalistic attitude of mill owners had vanished — along with their jobs, their homes, and mill profits. As mill owners demanded more work from fewer workers, employees sought relief — in the form of unions. Representatives began recruiting in the Upcountry, and by 1934, labor and management were locked in bitter conflict. Governor Ibra Blackwood sided with the owners and sent in National Guard troops to reopen closed mills. In Honea Path, orders went out: Shoot to kill. Seven striking workers died, and others were injured. As a

consequence for striking, many workers were banned from mill jobs, which violated terms of the strike settlement.

Company Towns

Mill owners saw benefits in building housing for their workers to keep them close to the mills. In the early 1900s, one family usually paid 50 cents per room per month for small but adequate accommodations. For some farm families, this was their first experience with electricity and running water. Mill villages offered schools, churches, social clubs, mill-sponsored sports teams, and company-operated stores, where workers redeemed company scrip for provisions. By paying workers in scrip, owners forced them to buy goods from company stores, returning their wages to the mills. Mill workers experienced a true sense of community within the mill village. Ostracized by the townspeople who called them “lintheads,” workers banded together and cared for each other. They worked, played, and worshipped together, sharing each other’s joys and sorrows as a community.

Other detailed background information about these topics can be found in:

Scott Foresman Growth of a Nation (5th Grade text)
Chapter 4 *Industry and Immigration*

The History of South Carolina in the Building of the Nation (8th Grade text) by Archie Vernon Huff, Jr
Chapters 22 *Life and Work in The Postbellum Years*

Greenville The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont by Archie Vernon Huff pp. 234-248; 292-305

The South Carolina Encyclopedia edited by Walter Edgar

The Textile Industry in Greenville County, South Carolina by Martha A. Shaw

Textile Mill by Marguerite Rabin

Mill and Town in South Carolina 1180-1920 by David Carlton

Various books in the South Carolina Room at the Greenville Library
Primary Activity: Textile Mill Village Map

Materials

- Blank Textile Mill Map (attached)

Procedure

1. Print out the blank textile mill map (one per student)

2. After discussing southern textile mill villages, have students invent a fictional mill village and describe the operation of the mill (knitting, weaving, spinning, finishing).
3. Have students fill in the blank map using symbols to include features such as streets, mill owners house, workers' houses, stores, churches, schools, recreational parks, etc.
4. Have students provide a map key describing the symbols on their map.

Assessment

A rubric can be used to assess this project:

Student creates a map of a fictional mill village – 5 points

Student includes symbols on map -3 points

Student adds a map key describing symbols – 2 points

Cross-Curricular Activities

Social Studies

- * Take a look around your community. Are there old mill structures or ones still in business? Identify a mill, photograph it, and write a short description of when it was in business and what its operation was.
- * Are there churches and schools in your area that were once part of a textile mill village? Name some of them.

Writing

- * Create an advertisement to encourage people to come to work at your mill. Highlight the community qualities and benefits for you employees (bowling alley, child care center, sports teams, clubs, etc.)
- * Interview someone who works in a textile mill or who used to. Ask questions about what it was like to work in a textile mill and live in the mill village. How have things changed? Share your findings.

Art

- * Make a textile collage. Find examples of different types of fabrics produced in southern textile mills and create a collage using bits of cotton fibers, yarn, thread and fabric.
- * As a class project, turn the student's maps into a 3-D table-top mill village. Use recycled boxes to make houses and buildings. Paint on the streets and recreational facilities.