

A Plea for Manufacturing in the South

Anonymous, 1827

Introduction

Trends in the early nineteenth century toward political and social diversification in the three main geographic areas of the United States—the North, the West, and the South—were accompanied by increasing signs of economic sectionalism. The West was becoming a center for livestock, wheat, and other staples, and the industrial revolution was beginning in the Northeastern states, which were already the chief source of supply of manufactured goods. At the same time, the South was rapidly developing a one-crop economy based on cotton, which meant that it was increasingly dependent on the other regions. A number of Southerners, such as the anonymous author of this editorial in the Georgia Courier of June 21, 1827, saw dangers in this situation and urged that the South should not concentrate on cotton alone, but instead diversify its economy.

Source: *Courier (Augusta, Ga.)*, June 21, 1827 [A *Documentary History of the American Industrial Society*, John R. Commons, et al., eds., Cleveland, 1910–1911, Vol. I, pp. 289–290].

We see in the **Southern** papers propositions to exclude Northern manufacturers and Western pork, beef, etc., and to manufacture and wear our own cloth, and eat pork and beef, etc., of our own raising. The object to be obtained by these suggestions all must approve, whatever they may think of the spirit which urges their adoption at this particular moment. That we have cultivated cotton, cotton, cotton, and bought everything else, has long enough been our opprobrium. It is time we should be roused by some means or other to see that such a course of conduct will inevitably terminate in our ultimate poverty and ruin. Let us manufacture, because it is our best policy. Let us go more on provision crops and less on cotton, because we have had everything about us poor and impoverished long enough. This we can do without manifesting any ill nature to any of the members of the same great family, all whose earnings go to swell the general prosperity and happiness.

Much of our chagrin and ill nature on this subject may be justly, because truly, ascribed to a sense of shame which we of the **Southern** states feel, that we have been so long behind our Northern neighbors in the production of everything that substantially administers to the elegance or the comforts of life. It has been our own fault— not theirs. If we have followed a ruinous policy and bought all the articles of subsistence instead of raising them, who is to blame? For what have we not looked to our Northern friends? From them we get not only our clothes, carriages, saddles, hats, shoes, flour, potatoes, but even our onions and horn buttons. The latter we wear on our undergarments, as if ashamed to acknowledge that we owed the manufacture of such a trifling article to others.

Let us change our policy, but without that spirit and those expressions which leave a festering sore in the hearts of those who should be brothers. Let our farmers make and wear their homespun; raise in greater plenty corn and wheat, which will enable them to raise their own hogs, cattle, and horses; and let those who have capital and enterprise manufacture on a more extensive scale. There is nothing to prevent us from doing it. We have good land, unlimited waterpower, capital in plenty, and a patriotism which is running over in some places. If the tariff drives us to this, we say, let the name be sacred in all future generations.