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May 12,2019

The History of Cotton

Cotton played an important role in the history of India, the British Empire and the United States and to this day remains a very important crop. Several civilizations in the Old and the New World have domesticated and converted cotton into fabric. Throughout the process combs, bows, hand spindles and looms have been created. In the past, scientists have searched through caves and have found bits of cotton balls and pieces of cotton cloth that proved to be at least 7,000 years old. They have also found that cotton itself was much like that grown in the United States today. In the Indus River Valley in Pakistan, cotton was being grown, spun and woven into cloths/fabrics about 3,000years B.C. Natives at the time were both creating as well as wearing all sorts of cotton clothing. When Columbus discovered America, he found cotton growing in the Bahama islands and cotton grew to be well known throughout the world. The cotton seeds are believed to have been planted in Florida in 1556 and in Virginia in 1607. Later, the colonists were growing cotton along James Rive river in Virginia. Cotton was first spun by machinery in England in 1730. The Industrial Revolution in England and the invention of the cotton gin in the us paved the way for what cotton stands for in the world today. A woman named Eli Whitney, a native of Massachusetts, secured a patent on the cotton gin in 1793. It is thought that the first cotton gin was build by Noah Homes two years before Whitney filed for a patent. The Gin, short for engine was able to do the work 10 times faster then by hand. The Gin made it possible to supply large quantities of cotton fiber to the fast-growing textile industry.

Throughout time, the value of US cotton crop rose from \$150,000 to more then \$8 million. Cotton is a soft fluffy staple fiber the grows on the cotton plants. It grows in a ball around the seed of a plant. The fiber of cotton is almost pure cellulose. Several civilizations in both the Old and the New World started

using cotton for making fabrics. Cotton was used in the Old World from at least 5000 B.C. Evidence of cotton use has been found in Pakistan where early cotton threads were being preserved in copper beads. Some of the oldest cotton balls were discovered in a cave in Mexico and were dated to be approximately 3,600 B.C. There is also evidence of cotton found in Peru in the form of seeds. During the Middle Ages, cotton was a fabric in common use. It was hand woven on a loom until the 1350's. It was greatly improved with the introduction of the spinning wheel which increased the speed of cotton spinning. Cotton became very important and sought after in Europe during the Renaissance. The middle class became more concerned with cleanliness and fashion and the need for easily washable and colorful fabric increased. The East India Company introduced cotton to Britain in the 1600's. The spinning jenny, the water frame and the spinning mule were some of the machinery invented in 1770's. The industrial revolution made a very profitable manufacturing unit in Britain. Many workers had poor working conditions, low wages, child labor and 18-hour work days where many families had little to no time to sleep as they had to support the family.

The American cotton industry started growing tremendously with the invention of the Cotton Gin in 1793. The United States started to produce most of the world's cotton which led to the expansion of slavery. By the 1850's, slaves made 50% of the population in the United States. The industrial production of cotton until then took place in the Asian countries such as China, India and Latin America. Labor in those countries was much less expensive. The northern part of the United States bought more cotton and built more textile mills. England also built more textile mills and demanded much more cotton. The southern states were not able to build textile mills because their capital was tied up in the slavery, so they could produce more cotton. The south also had no capital or need to build up its transportation system such as railroads. The south had other disadvantages as opposed to the North. Their population was primarily made up of uneducated slaves. They had no factories to produce goods and become self-

reliant when they separated from the North. Also, they had no transportation system to help move men and supplies easily across the country.

The invention of the Cotton Gin made a great impact on the importance and the need for cotton. Cotton made a big impact on both men's and women's clothing and apparel. 75% of men's clothing contains type of cotton blend. 85% is made from pure cotton. Cotton continues to be the most popular and used fabric all over the world. Cotton is used to make men's suits, t shirts, dress shirts, underwear, jeans and sweatshirts. Cotton absorbency makes it very a very suitable fabric for wearing in warm weather conditions. The use of cotton in men's suits and shirts makes for comfortable business wear. The world uses cotton more than any other natural fiber. Its primarily grown to make cloth. Other parts of the cotton plant are put to good use in the production of foods, plastics and paper products. Cotton is a natural product and has many uses and advantages because of the way it is designed and manufactured into clothing. It can control moisture, insulate, provide comfort and is also hypoallergenic, durable and weather proof. Cotton is one of the most highly purchased and used fabrics all over the world. It is a natural fiber that has had a positive impact on people's lives. It not only changed the clothing and apparel world but also the environment and the way we work and do certain things today.