

Economics of History Activity

The Civil War

On the Home Front Struggles and Burdens

States in both the North and the South struggled with shortages of goods and declining finances on the home front during the Civil War. Southern states suffered added troubles caused by the Union naval blockade. Because of the blockade, Texas was unable to bring in goods and supplies. That created shortages of food and many everyday items, including coffee, shoes, clothing, medicine, and farm tools.

Since the majority of men, young and old, were away fighting for the Confederacy, women and those who were unable to fight had to perform the everyday tasks that men had previously performed, such as farming and repairing equipment. Women also took over men's jobs on the farms and in the factories.

The shortages of goods forced the women to become resourceful and find or make replacements whenever they could. They made homespun, a coarse, loosely woven fabric, to use as cloth for clothing and used thorns as sewing pins. They combined a mixture of grains and sweet potatoes to brew as coffee. Salt was difficult to find also. Some people dug up their smokehouses and sifted through the dirt beneath it for traces of salt. Since the anti-malaria drug quinine was needed for the troops, Texans used willow bark and red pepper to treat sickness. Newspapers were not printed because of the lack of paper, but families used pieces of wallpaper stripped from their walls for letters to their soldiers.

One of the reasons the Union army sought to invade Texas was that the North needed cotton for their textile mills. Union forces also wanted to stop the South from shipping cotton to Europe. The Confederacy was able to stop the Union from marching into Texas, and they were still able to sell their cotton. Texas cotton shipments traveled by land across the Mexican border and then by ship to Europe, where cotton could be traded for military supplies, medicine, and other goods. Most of these products were used for the Confederate army, however, so people on the home front continued to experience shortages.

Texas had a military office in charge of setting up factories in the state to make other supplies that were needed by the Confederate army and navy. The factories produced shoes, saddles, wagons, and tents for the military. Even the prisoners in the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville had jobs during the war. These men worked in the textile mill, making cloth for uniforms.

Economics of History Activity *cont.*



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Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

1. **Defining** What were some of the problems for people on the home front?

2. **Describing** How did Texans deal with these problems?

3. **Analyzing** Do you think the problems people faced on the home front in Texas were less serious or more serious than in other parts of the South, especially in the East? Why?

Critical Thinking

4. **Making Connections** Imagine that there is a similar situation today with shortages of food, clothing, and medicine you would use on an ordinary day. Write a short description of your day and how you would respond to the shortages or replace these needed items.
