Mississippi

Mississippi is located in the southern U.S. between Alabama to the east and Louisiana and Arkansas to the west. Tennessee forms the northern border while Mississippi has a short seacoast on the Gulf of Mexico to the south.

Early History

The early history of Mississippi is dominated by three major tribes of Native Americans: the Chickasaw, the Choctaw and the Natchez. The Chickasaw people lived in the northern part of present-day Mississippi and their livelihood was based upon hunting rather than farming. The Choctaws were related to the Chickasaw people and lived in south-central Mississippi. The Choctaw were good farmers and grew corn, beans, melons, and pumpkins as their staple crops. Around 1600, there were about 5,000 Chickasaw and 20,000 Choctaw people.

The Natchez people lived in southern Mississippi and relied on farming for food. The Natchez had a social structure that was unique among Native Americans; they had a class system and a supreme ruler. The Natchez ruler was called the Great Sun and his feet never touched the ground. He was either carried on a litter or his servants placed mats on the ground for him to walk on. He was accompanied by a royal class called suns. The next class included nobles. Common people were below nobles while slaves occupied the lowest social class. By 1600 the Natchez civilization was declining.

The first Europeans to explore Mississippi were the Spanish. De Soto and his forces crossed northern Mississippi but in spite of their metal armor and horses, which the Native Americans had never seen before, the fierce Chickasaw warriors drove the Spanish from their territory in 1541. A few months later, De Soto and his army were traveling along the southern Mississippi River and entered Natchez territory. The Natchez warriors drove the Spanish to the Gulf of Mexico and the Spanish fled to Cuba in July 1543.

There was no further contact with Europeans until French explorers sailed south on the Mississippi River, beginning from the Great Lakes far to the north. The French explorers included Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet and later La Salle claimed all the land around the Mississippi River for France. In 1699 the French king sent Pierre Le Moyne to create a settlement at the mouth of the
Mississippi River, but this area was not habitable. The land was not suitable for farming and people died from illnesses like dysentery and malaria from the boggy ground. In 1716 the French established Fort Rosalie which became the city Natchez.

French settlements resulted in conflicts with the Native Americans. The Chickasaw had been trading with the British and in 1720 the French ruled that this trade should stop. The Chickasaw people asserted their independence from French rule and continued an alliance with the British. A short war between the Chickasaws and French ensued and the Chickasaw warriors won. As a result of this defeat, the French strengthened their alliance with the Choctaws. Meanwhile, the French fought the Natchez people and killed most of them. The few Natchez survivors joined with the Choctaw people.

In 1736, the French renewed their efforts to conquer the Chickasaw nation but ultimately failed. After the French and Indian War that pitted the French and their Native American allies against the British, all the land east of the Mississippi River except for New Orleans was controlled by the British. By 1798 the young United States controlled the area and created the Mississippi Territory with boundaries quite different from the shape of Mississippi today. Settlers moved into the territory and in 1817 Mississippi became a state with its current boundaries.

**After Statehood**

The land in Mississippi was suitable for farming and large plantations were established in the fertile Mississippi Delta region. The first commercial crops were tobacco and indigo that were used to make blue dye for clothing. However, Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin (short for engine) that mechanized the labor-intensive removal of cotton seeds from the plant’s fibers, greatly improved the profitability of growing cotton. Cotton quickly became the most important crop. Growing cotton was still a labor-intensive endeavor and plantation owners brought thousands of African slaves to Mississippi.

Meanwhile the federal government cleared the area of Native Americans. The Treaty of Doak’s Stand forced the Choctaw people to give up their land in central Mississippi in 1820. Ten years later they relinquished their remaining land under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. In 1832 the Chickasaw nation gave up their territory under the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek. All Native Americans were resettled in
Indian Territory, the name for present-day Oklahoma. The tribes were forced to travel on foot; this journey is called the Trail of Tears.

The opening of new territory for expansion due to Indian removal, as it was called, and the peace it promised caused Mississippi’s population to just about double between 1830 and 1840. That meant that the slave population doubled as well. Slavery was ingrained in the plantation culture and remained a way of life in Mississippi as large plantation owners dominated state government and politics.
Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True  False  Mississippi has a seacoast on the gulf of Mexico.

2. True  False  The Chickasaw people, who lived in northern Mississippi, were good farmers and grew corn, beans, melons, and pumpkins as their staple crops.

3. True  False  The Natchez social structure began with a supreme rule and the social classes were royalty, nobles, common people and slaves.

4. True  False  The Spanish explorer De Soto and his army were driven from Mississippi first by the Chickasaw and then by the Natchez people.

5. True  False  When France claimed the land in Mississippi, the Chickasaw people stopped trading with the British and instead formed an alliance with the French.

6. True  False  The French almost completely exterminated the Natchez people; the few remaining survivors joined the Choctaw nation.

7. True  False  Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin mechanized the picking of cotton, making cotton a more profitable crop for Mississippi plantation owners.

8. True  False  After Mississippi became a state the federal government systematically removed all Native Americans from the area, forcibly moving them to Indian Territory.

9. True  False  Even after Native American tribes relinquished their lands, settlers from the eastern U.S. were still reluctant to move into the new state of Mississippi.

10. True  False  Slavery was ingrained in plantation culture and remained a way of life in Mississippi as large plantation owners dominated state government and politics.
Answers

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. True