Eli Whitney.

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Inventor

- **Born:** December 8, 1765
- **Birthplace:** Westboro, Massachusetts
- **Died:** January 8, 1825
- **Place of death:** New Haven, Connecticut

Eli Whitney is known for two very important inventions: the cotton gin and interchangeable parts.

Eli Whitney (1765-1825), inventor of the cotton gin. Library of Congress

A cotton gin on display at the Eli Whitney Museum. By Tom Murphy VII (Taken by uploader, user:brighterorange.) [Public

Eli Whitney was born on December 8, 1765, in Westboro, Massachusetts. He was the oldest of four children, and his father was a farmer. When he was a boy he spent a great deal of time in his father's workshop. Whitney's first business venture was during the American Revolutionary War . During the war he made and sold nails, which were scarce at the time.

At age eighteen, Eli decided to go to college. He prepared for college by attending Leicester Academy in Massachusetts. He worked as a schoolmaster in nearby communities to earn money for his education. In 1789, he entered Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut.

After graduating from Yale, he traveled to Georgia to work as a tutor for the children of a wealthy plantation owner. It was while he was in Georgia that he saw how hard and time-consuming it was to remove the cotton seeds by hand. The process took many hours to remove every seed from just a few pounds of cotton.

In 1793, Whitney built his first cotton gin. The machine was a cylinder with many saw-like teeth attached to it. When the cylinder was turned, the teeth passed through the cotton like a comb. As cotton was fed into the machine, the teeth pulled the cotton fibers through and left the seeds behind.

domain], via Wikimedia Commons

In 1794, Whitney got a patent for his cotton gin and began selling it. Unfortunately, at first he was not very successful at selling his invention.

Southern plantation owners broke into his shop and figured out how the machine worked. It was so simple that they began to build their own that were based on his design, and they never paid Whitney any money. It would be years before he was able to make any money from his machine.

The invention of the cotton gin was one of the most important events in the history of the American cotton industry. However, it there is a negative result of the invention.

Before the invention of the cotton gin, the slave trade in the Southern United States was beginning to slow down, and many plantation owners were not making enough money to have a large number of slaves.

Once plantation owners began using cotton gins, however, they started to make more money and were able to have more and more slaves. Whitney was very disappointed that his invention was causing so many people so much pain and suffering.

After he invented the cotton gin, Whitney returned to Connecticut where he designed another invention—interchangeable parts.

With this idea Whitney could produce a gun lock that would fit all other guns of the same type.

In 1798, the United States government gave him a contract to make 10,000 muskets for the Army at Springfield, Massachusetts. Until that time all guns were made one at a time by an experienced gunsmith.

Whitney believed that ordinary workmen could make guns in large quantities by using his mass production methods.

Whitney built the factory, designed machines to produce each of the gun parts in quantity, and then he hired workers to assemble the parts. Delays held up the project and the last of the muskets was not completed until eleven years later.

Whitney's invention was successful in that he had shown how mass production methods and assembly lines could be used in manufacturing. In 1812, he was given another contract, this time for 15,000 muskets.

Whitney died of a long-time illness on January 8, 1825.

Whitney's Inventions Include:

- cotton gin
- interchangeable parts
- assembly lines

In the late 1700s Eli Whitney built a embroidery frame for Mrs. Green, the wife of the Revolutionary General, Nathanael Green.

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By Phyllis Barkas Goldman

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