


## Chapter 33 -- Eli Whitney Transforms Cotton Industry Economics

 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Inventor of Cotton Gin.</i></p>	<p><b>Dates:</b> 1792</p>	<p><b>Sections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invention Of The Cotton Gin</li> </ul>
---	-------------------------------	---

\*\*\*\*\*

Time: 1792

### **Invention Of The Cotton Gin**



Just as Hamilton is opening the way for America to build an industrial economy, a Massachusetts man named Eli Whitney patents a “cotton gin” (short for “engine”) that reshapes the South’s commitment to agriculture.

Throughout the colonial period, the primary southern crops are tobacco, rice, wheat and indigo.

Cotton production is minimal and concentrated along the coastal islands of South Carolina, in the variety known as “long-staple (2 inch fiber) cotton.”

Its cousin is the “short-staple (1 inch fiber) cotton,” which is much heartier when it comes to surviving in lower temperature regions. However it has many more sticky seeds per “boll,” and separating these seeds from the fiber by hand is so labor intensive as to be cost prohibitive.

Eli Whitney (1765-1825)

In 1790, American exports of cotton – mainly long staple from South Carolina – total only 140,000 pounds, valued at just over \$2 million.

But that is about to change in a hurry.

All because of Whitney, a Westborough, Massachusetts man, who tinkers with nail manufacturing as a youth, graduates from Yale University and, after visiting a plantation in Georgia in 1792, invents and patents his “cotton gin.”

Whitney’s “gin” is ingenious. It removes seeds from cotton lint at 50 times the speed of human hands, and, in turn, it enables the profitable planting of short staple cotton across the South from Virginia westward.

Almost immediately the production and sale of cotton sky-rockets – and, as it takes off, it also dawns on plantation owners that they have a “second crop” capable of very high demand and very high prices.

That “second crop” lies in breeding their black slaves.