# Slavery and the Cotton Gin

Before the discovery of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney, the harvesting and cleaning of cotton was a slow-moving and was a labor rigorous task. The workers who were mostly slaves did all the work as they had to peel the seeds from the cotton threads by their hands and not any machine. Although some farmers at the time used a kind of cotton gin, it was not very operational, and thus it broke with time. Southern planters were very anxious for a better way to peel off the seeds from cotton threads. Eli Whitney decided to try and invent a cotton ginning machine (Bethea n.p). At this particular time, Whitney was employed as an instructor in a plantation in Georgia. With financial assistance from his boss, he came up with an efficient machine. He filed a patent application for his cotton gin with the U.S. government, arguing, “…if turned with horses or water, two persons will clean as much cotton in one day as a hundred could clean at the same time with the gins now in common use” (Masters 50).The gin thus spread in the south as this was the main side where cotton was mostly grown. Although the gin led to large-scale plantation of cotton, it increased slavery. The cotton gin increased slavery because machines are faster and the machine allowed southern planters the ability to grow a variety of cotton at an augmented rate.

Even though Whitney’s cotton gin invention led to mass production in many parts of America, it came along with negative effects (Masters n.p). Eli Whitney took some time to invent this machine, but he finally fulfilled the dreams of the farmers as he came up with a gin that served well and in an effective way. Although he was not financially stable when he was trying to invent this machine, he was able to get help, and within months he came up with the workable machine. The main purpose for the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney was to successfully pull out the seeds from the cotton bolls in a faster way compared to the use of hands by the workers (Wharton n.p). The gin improved the reaping of cotton. He also invented this machine to ensure high production of cotton in the southern parts of American where cotton would grow successfully. His gin became popular in the south because of the good work that it would perform (Bethea n.p). It was very strong and more reliable than the workers. Workers would at times escape thus failing to the job.

The cotton gin invention increased labor required in the plantations which thus led to the increase in slavery as more slaves were needed to work in the farmers. The cotton gin helped in the refining of cotton with ease yet farmers still wanted more laborers to pick the cotton leading to the need for more slaves (Lakwete n.p). The number of the slaves in America increased rapidly after the invention of the machine. The treatment of slaves became worse as the number was very hard to maintain. They were treated poorly leading to the slave nations separating when Abolitionists needed to banish slavery (Johnson 52). An invention that would otherwise bring growth and happiness to the society and the whole of the country turned to bloodshed and suffering of people.

The cotton gin made the picking of seeds faster compared to the time when workers used their hands in picking the seeds. The amount of cotton that would be processed in a day was very large thus it led to the large-scale farming (Johnson n.p). It made the picking of the seeds faster in that you would only turn the handle after you have put the cotton bolls on top of the machine which then turns the cotton through the wire that had some teeth and the seeds were combed out. The image below shows how the cotton gin looked like:

 

After the seeds were combed out, the cotton was pulled out of the gin (Wharton 71). The cotton gin was very faster and efficient as it would perform a bigger job compared to many people per day thus planters would make more profit. Economically speaking, greater profits meant more work was also required to be done. The gin made it possible to grow cotton largely on bigger farms and make more money. Although the invention of the cotton gin meant fewer slaves or workers in operation, it made the growing of cotton more profitable thus more and more people began to get into the plantation and more specifically the people in the south (Whitehead 271). Cotton thus became the main source of money and wealth among the people in the south of America replacing tobacco.

Although there was hope that slavery would reduce in America, the invention of cotton gin worsen the requirement of slaves. Slaves in the south increase such that in every three people you come across, one was a slave. The number increased rapidly due to the large-scale growing of cotton (Lakwete 65). Slaves increase such that in the first federal census of 1790 counted 697,897 slaves; by 1810, there were 1.2 million slaves, a 70 percent increase. Slavery spread to other western territories as cotton fields were planted largely such that by 1830, it flourished in more than half of the region.

The other worse effect that the cotton gin had on slaves is that its success made it generally difficult to purchase their freedom. The slaves were locked in the plantations under harsh condition, and they were also treated poorly as they were never fed well yet they worked for long hours (Whitehead 260). They would not obtain even their freedom through the good will of their masters. The life of the slaves became extremely bad as they had no minute to rest but to work on the cotton plantations. In each decade, about 100,000 slaves were forced to move to the west (Lakwete n.p). The slaveholders who farmed tobacco had to make more profits in the selling of the slaves as tobacco was no longer profitable to them. There came a time when abolitionists (Pennsylvania Abolition Society) had demanded to end up slavery in the United States (Bethea 80). This brought some enmity between nations and others went even to the extent of wanting to separate. More and more slaves were brought from Africa due to the cotton boom. This brought a lot of fear among people and more specifically in Africa as they would be kidnapped and sold into slavery in the south where there were large cotton plantations (Whitehead 250). The slaves were treated poorly in these farms and thus even died in the process of being forced to work. It brought a lot of separation between families as others escaped due to the fear of being sold as slaves in the south. The business of slaves at this particular time became the order of the day as the slavers captured slaves from Africa and other parts of Asia then sold them at a profit.

In conclusion, the cotton gin increased slavery because machines are faster and the machine allowed southern planters the ability to grow a variety of cotton at an increased rate. Although Eli Whitney never intended to increase slavery with his great innovation, it brought a lot of suffering among many families because of the high demand for slaves at this period of time. Slavery increased tremendously as they were required to work in the plantations farms to make more profits. In spite of the fact that invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney brought an increase in the demand for slaves in the south, the machine also led to prosperity in the farming of cotton. It made work easier and fast as the gin was very effective in its working compared to the time when workers would pull off the seeds on their hands. Even today, the cotton gin is still used in the south and has greatly assisted in the production of cotton in larger amounts thus bringing huge profits to the farmers. Farming of cotton has been made easier as reaping of seeds would be done effectively and in a better way.

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