

Topic Page: [Whitney, Eli, 1765-1825](#)

Definition: **Whitney, Eli 1765-1825**, from *Dictionary of Energy*

U.S. engineer famous for his invention of the cotton gin (1794), a machine for separating cotton fibers from the seeds. This invention had immense economic and social effects in the U.S. He went on to establish a firearms factory based on methods comparable to modern mass industrial production, including the use of standardized, interchangeable parts.

Summary Article: **Whitney, Eli**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1765–1825, American inventor of the cotton gin, b. Westboro, Mass., grad. Yale, 1792. When he was staying as tutor at Mulberry Grove, the plantation of Mrs. Nathanael Greene, Whitney was encouraged by Mrs. Greene and visiting cotton planters to try to find some device by which the fiber of short-staple cotton could be rapidly separated from the seed. Whitney, whose creative mechanical bent had been evident from boyhood, completed his model gin early in 1793, after about 10 days of work, and by April had built an improved one. With Phineas Miller, Mrs. Greene's plantation manager (and later her husband), he formed a partnership to manufacture gins at New Haven. He was unable to make enough gins to meet the demand, and although the partners received a patent in 1794, others copied his model and soon many gins were in use. After much litigation the partners received (1807) a favorable decision to protect their patent, but Congress in 1812 denied Whitney's petition for its renewal. His invention, which had immense economic and social effects, brought great wealth to many others, but little to Whitney himself. In 1798 he built a firearms factory near New Haven. The muskets his workmen made by methods comparable to those of modern mass industrial production were the first to have standardized, interchangeable parts.

See biographies by J. Mirsky and A. Nevins (1962) and D. Olmsted (1846, repr. 1972);
Green, C. M. , *Eli Whitney and the Birth of American Technology* (1956).

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Whitney, Eli. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/whitney_eli_1765_1825



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