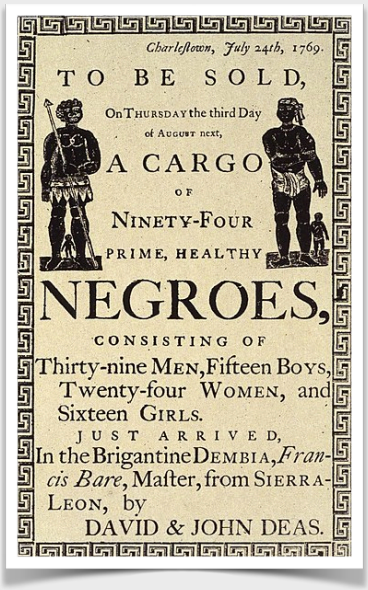
INVENTIONS

AND HOW THEY MADE HISTORY


Charlestown, July 24th, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,

On THURSDAY the third Day of AUGUST next,

A CARGO OF NINETY-FOUR PRIME, HEALTHY

NEGROES,

CONSISTING OF

Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS, Twenty-four WOMEN, and Sixteen GIRLS.

JUST ARRIVED,

In the Brigantine DEMBIA, *Francis Bare*, Master, from SIERRA-LEON, by

DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

Divided On Slavery

Slavery was an issue for America long before there was even a country. Existing for centuries, a formal desire to end slavery on this side of the Atlantic goes back to the late 1600's, in a petition by the Quakers to end the slave trade. However, there were equal efforts at the same time and in following years to increase and expand the slave market, seeing it as necessary and, to some people, good.

The Cotton Gin

Cotton became such an important crop in Early America, particularly in the south where it was warmer. Cotton is so very important for so many things, such as clothing and all different kinds of fabrics, and it did not take long for America to become the largest producer of cotton in the world; Eli Whitney's invention of the Cotton Gin is a major reason for that.

What is Cotton?

Cotton is a soft, fluffy fibrous material that grows on top of a particular plant. The cotton serves as a protective case for the seeds of the plant and then, when the plant dies, the seeds fall out to the ground and grow into more plants. Use of the cotton plant goes back over 7000 years in many different regions around the world, including Southern Asia, the Americas, the Middle East, and China. When the cotton fibers are harvested and the seeds removed, it can be spun and woven to make into fabrics.

The Slave Market

Cotton takes a lot of work to harvest. No machinery existed yet that could separate the cotton fibers from the thorny plant, bring it in, and then separate the seeds from the cotton itself, all by hand. The amount of people it took to do all of that on a cotton farm or plantation was enormous, which led to an increased desire among farmers to grow the slave market. Purchasing slaves to do the work instead of paying workers was the way most plantation owners ensured their profit. Slaves were bought either directly from Africa or from South America and the Caribbean, where slaves already existed for other purposes, such as rum.

Eli Whitney

In 1793 AD, an inventor by the name of Eli Whitney invented a machine that could separate seeds from the cotton fibers. Eli's father was a farmer himself, giving Eli a particular insight into the issues of harvesting. This Cotton Gin that he invented simply pulled the cotton through a set of wire teeth on a revolving cylinder, which passed the cotton fibers through narrow iron slots, pushing the seeds out and dropping them to the ground. Not only did the cotton gin become used and popular right away, it also became the most copied invention very quickly. Now, one worker could do the work of dozens, simply pouring the cotton fibers into the machine and turning the wheel.

Impact

Ironically, the very machine that made cotton harvesting easier made slavery grow even more. The Cotton Gin made growing cotton more profitable, since it now took only one worker to remove the seeds, leading to a desire for more and more plantation fields. Since slaves were still the primary source of labor, more and more slaves were purchased to work the growing fields. Because of this, Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin is credited with making cotton the primary crop of the southern United States and making slavery a staple of the American economy.