

Name: _____ Date: _____

Not All Southerners Were Slaveholders

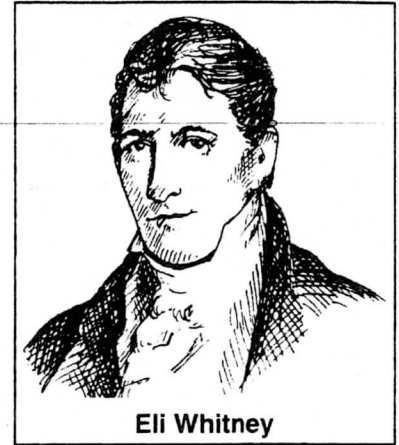
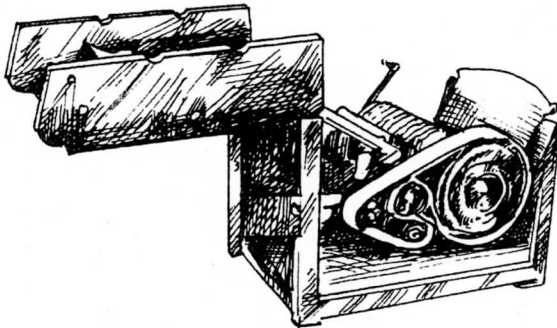
Most people think of White Southerners in the 1700s and 1800s as slave owners, but only one in four Southern families actually owned slaves. Three-quarters of Southern families did not own slaves.

By the time the Civil War began in 1861, about 25 percent of the Blacks in the South were free. Most free Blacks in the South weren't much better off than slaves, but in some areas they were allowed to marry, own property, attend schools, and even own slaves of their own.

Not all slaves worked on huge plantations. Only about 30,000 Southerners owned fifty or more slaves. Most Southerners who owned slaves lived and worked on smaller farms and in cities. Slaves also worked in shipyards, in businesses, and as house slaves.

Sometimes slaves were hired out by their masters and all wages were paid to their owners. Southerners needed cheap labor to work the fields of cotton and tobacco. This made slavery very important to the economy.

The invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 cut the cost of producing cotton. This machine could clean cotton much faster than people could. Since this lowered the cost of producing cotton, the price went down, and the demand for cotton cloth increased. Growing more cotton meant the need for even more workers.



Eli Whitney

Wealthy families who owned large plantations and many slaves wanted to maintain their status by controlling the source of their wealth—cotton, slaves, and all laws regarding slavery. Unlike other societies, slavery in the South was not based on forcing prisoners of war to be slaves—slavery was based on race.

The early European colonists believed that Africans were inferior, suited by their character and circumstances to be slaves forever. This attitude remained most strongly in the South, long after Europe abolished slavery and the slave trade.

1. What percentage of Southerners were not slaveholders? _____

2. How would you feel if you were forced to go to work six days a week for ten or more hours a day, but received no pay for your work?

3. How would you feel if you were a farmer today and the government wanted to pass a law making tractors illegal?
