

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty-Six

Free To Create

LESSON IDEA

One of freedom's greatest benefits is that under it, man will be his most creative. Without freedom, on the other hand, creativity is stifled.

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THE MASTER Creator, who declared, "Let us make man in our own image," has given every individual the ability to create. Man the dreamer is also man the builder. And when man's imagination and abilities are given an opportunity to develop, this creative talent can bear more wonderful fruit than any orchard in the world. Thanks to this gift, every person has the ability to make some significant contribution that will benefit his family, his country, and perhaps the entire world.

The great sculptor Michelangelo translated living thoughts into enduring marble. Beethoven, though deaf, walked in the woods with God, and in his glorious and enduring music expressed the triumph of the human soul over adversity. Shakespeare dipped his pen so deep into the ink of human understanding that after four centuries his plays and poems still stimulate and delight succeeding generations. A group of courageous and inspired statesmen, after defeating the army of England, drafted the Constitution of the United States, and secured liberty for a new nation.

While not all of us will become famous writers, painters, musicians, or statesmen, all of us have been given some creative abilities. Do you think it is important to develop and use these abilities? Why?

[*Let everyone answer.*] Since we will be happiest and most productive when we are exercising these abilities, it is important to ask what conditions are necessary for us to be creative. What are some of the things you can think of that would encourage you to be creative? [*Some factors to mention are necessity, ambition, opportunity, and encouragement.*]

There are many factors that determine how creative someone will be. But certainly one of the most important is freedom. The greatest invention in the world will benefit no one, if the inventor is not permitted to build it or use it. The most beautiful music or the most stirring play will never inspire anyone, if it cannot be performed or read.

For more than 6,000 years, most people have lived in poverty and abject misery. In country after country, for century after century, only a handful of rulers even lived in homes that had windows and chimneys and floors. The vast multitudes of mankind have seldom enjoyed enough food to keep their stomachs filled, or enough clothes to keep their bodies warm. But now, after just a few generations, we in America take well-furnished homes and well-stocked refrigerators for granted. We regard telephones, washing machines, indoor plumbing, furnaces, and automobiles as necessities, while for most people on earth they are unimaginable luxuries.

The tremendous advances that have been made in America are just one illustration of how individual creativity can bring enormous benefits to everyone.

Let us look tonight at the experiences and contributions of one of our creative predecessors, to see if we can discover, in the example of his life, some truths about freedom and creativity that apply to us today.

ELI WHITNEY, the son of a well-to-do farmer, was born in Massachusetts in 1765. After graduating from Yale College, he moved to Georgia. He had planned to become a private tutor, and to study law in his spare time. However, when he arrived in Georgia, he found that the teaching position he had come to fill had already been taken by another young man.

Rather than return to Massachusetts, young Whitney decided to remain in Georgia. An amateur mechanic of considerable ability, he soon became challenged by the extremely difficult and laboriously slow work in the cotton fields. Up until that time, cotton was not only picked by hand but after it was harvested, all of the seeds had to be pulled out of the cotton ball by hand before it could be sold. Whitney determined to invent a machine that would automatically separate the seeds from the cotton.

Within a few months, the young scholar had built the world's first cotton gin. With Whitney's gin, one man could separate the seeds from fifty pounds of cotton in one day. Prior to his invention, it required nearly four dozen men, all working by hand for a full

day, to prepare fifty pounds of cotton for the mills.

As a result of Whitney's invention, do you think that more people or less began growing cotton? What do you think happened to the price of cotton? Because it required so many less workers to prepare it for market, do you think cotton became more expensive, or less?

Yes, the price of cotton went down. Many more persons began growing it. All over the South, cotton acreage was expanded, and the area entered a period of great productivity. In fact, in less than ten years, the annual production of cotton in America increased from less than 5,000,000 pounds to over 50,000,000 pounds.

But that is not all that occurred. The availability of cotton in such large quantities and at such low cost stimulated the development of weaving and cloth manufacturing in the North. Soon machine-produced cloth could be obtained at prices within the reach of everyone. It was no longer necessary for housewives to work late into the night, at spinning wheels and hand looms, to make the cloth for their husbands' shirts and their daughters' dresses.

The invention of the cotton gin made possible good, inexpensive clothing for every American. Ultimately it benefited all of us. But at the time, it did not benefit Eli Whitney. At first, he decided to build a factory in Connecticut to manufacture cotton gins. But his invention was so easy to duplicate and so simple in operation that others decided to build gins, rather than buy one from the inventor. Whitney sued some of the other manufacturers for copying his invention without his permission, but before he collected anything, his own factory burned down and his partner died. And some people even disputed that Whitney had invented the cotton gin. The machine that helped so many persons make more money actually lost money for its inventor.

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

The important point to stress in this lesson is that man must be free to be creative. In the United States, where we have enjoyed more freedom than any other nation in history, man's inventiveness and creativity have produced an abundance of goods that was unimaginable just two centuries ago — and is still unknown in most of the world.

Ask younger children to make a list of some of the items in your home that were not available to our pioneer forefathers. Some examples are electric lights, central heating, television, telephones, radios, and refrigerators. What was life like for those early Americans without these inventions? What did they use in place of them?

Are there any countries today where people are not free to be creative? How does the standard of living there compare with ours?

AFTER ALL of this, how do you imagine that Eli Whitney felt about his invention? How would you feel if your invention saved many hours of work, and helped produce many goods, but you received almost no credit or money for it? Wouldn't you be depressed if you saw your idea stolen by others and your factory in flames?

Eli Whitney must have been very disappointed.

