

Resource Sheet #07

Source: A Letter From Thomas Jefferson to William A. Burwell, January 28, 1805.
Courtesy of *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book*

Note: Jefferson's secretary William Burwell, a Virginian native, was part of the Presidential "family" from 1804 until 1806. Burwell's support for Jefferson was steadfast, and he led Jefferson's defense in 1805 against the accusations of the journalist James Callender. Jefferson and Burwell maintained a warm personal and political correspondence for years after Jefferson's departure from the President's House.

"...I have long since given up the expectation of any early provision for the extinguishment of slavery among us. There are many virtuous men who would make any sacrifice to affect it, many equally virtuous men who persuade themselves either that the thing is not wrong. Or that it cannot be remedied. And very many with whom interest is morality. The older we grow, the larger we are disposed to believe the last party to be. But interest is really going over to the side of morality. The value of the slave is every day lessening. His burden on his master is daily increasing. Interest is therefore preparing the disposition to be just; and this be will goaded from time to time by the insurrectionary spirit of the slaves. This is easily quelled in its first efforts, but from being local it will become general. And whenever it does, it will rise more formidable after every defeat, until we shall be forced, after dreadful scenes and sufferings to release them in their own way, which without such sufferings we might now model after our own convenience..."

Document Analysis:

1. By 1805, how does Jefferson feel about the prospects for the abolition of slavery?
2. Describe the many different attitudes that seemed to exist at this time about the issue slavery.
3. Jefferson seems to indicate that slavery may fail on its own. What evidence for the document supports that theory?
4. Describe how Jefferson sees the potential for violence, and its effect on abolition.
5. How does this document help to answer the question, "Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?"