

Resource Sheet #12

Source: Thomas Jefferson's letter to Benjamin Banneker, Philadelphia, Aug. 30, 1791

Sir,

I thank you sincerely for your letter of the 19th. instant and for the Almanac it contained. No body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colours of men, & that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa & America. I can add with truth that no body wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body & mind to what it ought to be, as fast as the imbecillity of their present existence, and other circumstance which cannot be neglected, will admit. I have taken the liberty of sending your almanac to Monsieur de Condorcet, Secretary of the Academy of sciences at Paris, and member of the Philanthropic society because I considered it as a document to which your whole colour had a right for their justification against the doubts which have been entertained of them. I am with great esteem, Sir,

Your most obedt. humble servt.

Th. Jefferson

Document Analysis:

1. What proof does Jefferson cite that African Americans are capable of equal talents.
2. How does Jefferson feel about slavery and its affect on the progress of African Americans?
3. Does Jefferson sound like an abolitionist or slave owner in his letter? Explain.
4. How has Banneker inspired him to do more? What are Jefferson's plans?