

## **Where did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?**

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Grade Level: Middle

Duration: 1-2 90-minute periods

### **Overview:**

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most talented political figures of his time. He was a prolific writer, philosopher, inventor, farmer, diplomat and political leader. Questions remain concerning Jefferson's personal life with regards to slave ownership. Through his writings and actions, Thomas Jefferson is shown as holding conflicting views of the institution of slavery and its future in the new nation.

This History Lab can be taught using a variety of strategies. Depending upon the length of the school instructional period, the inquiry can take one to two 90-minute periods. The number of documents that the teacher chooses to be analyzed and interpreted, as well as the pre-writing strategies, can be factors in determining the length of instructional time.

By examining maps, letters, drawings, documents, cartoons, paintings, and statistics, students will be able to explain in writing how the information in primary sources can be evidence in answering a provocative historical question.

### **History Standards**

#### **National History Standards:**

##### Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

- Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society
- Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

##### Era 4: Expansion and Reform

- Understands how the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions.
- Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800.

#### **Maryland Curriculum Standards:**

- Describe how unresolved social, economic, and political issues impacted disenfranchised groups.
- Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of early industrialization on the economy and society.
- Describe pro-slavery and anti-slavery positions and explain how debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism.
- Analyze the experiences of African-American slaves, and free blacks.

## **Purpose**

- Evaluate factors that contributed to the growing sectionalism in the Early National Period.
- Explain the differences in points of view as expressed by abolitionists and by the defenders of slavery in primary source documents.
- Identify economic conditions that supported a continuation of the practice of slavery in the South.

## **Topic Background**

Thomas Jefferson has achieved fame as a founding father of the United States. He was an accomplished Revolutionary author, foreign diplomat, secretary of state, vice-president, president, inventor, educator, planter, slave owner and abolitionist. He was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, the chief architect of the Northwest Ordinances, the driving force behind the Louisiana Purchase, and the founder of the University of Virginia.

While Jefferson contributed much to our American historical culture, he often comes under criticism for his support of and participation in the enslavement of African Americans. Jefferson, who called the institution of slavery an “abominable crime,” was a slaveholder for all of his adult life. Successful in outlawing the international slave trade to Virginia, he was disappointed by the failure of his early efforts to end or restrict slavery, and came to believe that a practicable solution to the problem could not be found in his lifetime. He continued, however, to advocate privately his own emancipation plan, which included a provision for resettling slaves outside the United States.

While considering slavery a moral travesty, hideous evil, and clearly at odds with his values of the American Revolution and republican virtue, Jefferson owned several hundred slaves at his home at Monticello and surrounding agricultural farms and businesses. In much of his correspondence to friends and business associates, Jefferson laments the immoral institution of slavery and yet describes how it must continue.

Jefferson and many of his peers were afraid that the abolition of slavery would cause violence throughout the South and racial prejudice in the North. They were concerned that agriculture on large farms, long dependent on slave labor, would collapse without a subjugated labor force. While Jefferson defended abolition in the Northwest Territories, he allowed it to expand in the Louisiana Territory. As a revolutionary, he attacked slavery. As an elected politician of a divided nation, he defended it.

Jefferson's relationship with slavery is certainly riddled with contradiction, both in words and deeds. His words expressed a hatred and disdain for an institution that ran contradictory to the ideals of democracy and human rights; while defending racial inferiority, political indifference, and economic security. His deeds reflected a dedication to righteousness, but only when they were socially popular or relevant to personal or political security. Many questions remain unanswered. Why did Jefferson change his views over time and when his responsibilities to the nation were altered? How did he feel about the African-American and his capabilities, as well as his rights? After studying the many documents presented here, one question might be answered: "*Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?*"

## Vocabulary

**Mulatto:** A person of mixed white and black ancestry, esp. a person with one white and one black parent.

**Bagatelle:** A thing of little importance; a very easy task.

**Emancipation:** To be set free, especially from legal, social, or political restrictions.

**Expatriation:** A person who lives outside their native country.

**Tincture:** To be tinged, flavored, or imbued with a slight amount of.

**Fugitive:** a person who has escaped from a place or is in hiding, esp. to avoid arrest or persecution

**Subscriber:** Apply for or undertake to pay for an offering of shares of stock. Contribute or undertake to contribute a certain sum of money to a particular fund, project, or charitable cause, typically on a regular basis

**Northwest Territory:** a region and former territory of the U.S. that lies between the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and the Great Lakes. It was acquired in 1783 after the American Revolution and now forms the states of Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

**Ordinance:** A piece of legislation enacted by a municipal authority.

**Insurrection:** A violent uprising against an authority or government.

**Monticello:** A historic estate southeast of Charlottesville, in central Virginia, the home of Thomas Jefferson.

**Lego, Shadwell, Poplar Forest, Elk Hill:** A collection of working farms in the Monticello/Charlottesville area that Jefferson's extended family owned and managed.

**Amalgamation:** The action, process, or result of combining or uniting.

**Thither:** To or toward that place.

**Benjamin Banneker:** U.S. inventor, astronomer, and mathematician. Born to a slave father and freed slave mother, he published an almanac 1791–1802 that featured his astronomical and tide calculations. On the recommendation of Thomas Jefferson, he was hired to assist in the surveying of the District of Columbia 1790.

**Manumission:** To release from slavery; set free.

**Extirpation:** To root out and destroy completely.

## **Where did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?**

**Objective:** Using a series of primary source documents and pre-writing organizational tools as historical evidence, students will construct an essay to solve a proposed inquiry.

This History Lab is designed as a multi-day instructional experience. An overall plan is provided for the activities to be completed on each day of the Lab, followed by the specific procedures for each step. A suggested time frame is given. Student and teacher versions are provided for each numbered Resource Sheet.

### **Planning for the History Lab:**

#### **Day One (45-60 Minutes)**

##### **Step One: "The Hook"**

The purpose of the hook is to generate an interest in the topic or question that is to be answered. It is usually an activity that gets the students engaged in problem solving and meta-cognition.

**Step Two: “The Background Essay”**

After posing the question, students will read a background essay. Students can read silently, individually orally, or by the teacher out loud. Analyze the data in class discussion or provide guiding questions to help in understanding. Choose the best strategy that fits the ability and learning styles of a particular class or students.

**Step Three: “Understanding the Question and Pre-Writing Organization”**

Assist students by defining critical vocabulary and key words that they may need to answer the question. Describe some expectations that you may have for answering the question effectively such as the two opposing viewpoints that may exist and the amount of interpretive evidence that may be required to properly answer the question.

**Step Four: “Document Analysis” (Resource Sheets #3 - #16)**

Re-define the terms primary and secondary source documents and provide generic examples of each in an attempt to focus the analysis of each document. Provide a set of analysis questions to help in the understanding of each document, or provide a chart that helps to organize the interpretive data that each document provides and discuss each category that the students are expected to complete. If necessary, complete the first document analysis (Resource Sheet #3), together as a class, as an example to insure understanding of the objective.

At the end of day one, many options exist. Documents can be assigned for analysis and interpretation for homework, or the class can wait and continue on Day 2.

**Day Two (45-60 Minutes)**

**Step Four Continued: “Document Analysis”**

Choose the desired number of documents based on time and the ability of the class. Be sure to offer selected documents that would inspire discussion of both sides of the slave issue and Jefferson’s attitudes. Have the students work individually, in pairs or small groups to analyze each document and complete the questions or the chart. After adequate time has been given, open full class discussion of all or only selected documents.

**Step Five: “Pre-Writing, Bucketing, and Chicken Foot” (DBQ Project terminology)**

Have the students create a thesis by organizing their data into one of two arguments: Thomas Jefferson was against slavery or Thomas Jefferson supported slavery. The students should offer three examples to support their argument, regardless of the thesis. If they believe that Jefferson was anti-slave, they should offer examples from three documents to support that theory. If they believe that Jefferson was pro-slave, they should offer examples from three documents that support that theory.

### **Day Three (45-60 Minutes)**

#### **Step Six: “From Thesis to Essay Writing That Answers the Question”**

This is a good time to address any clarification and discussion of the issue before creating the essay. Students may use any pre-writing strategy that works for them; cognitive webs, outlines and bulleted lists are all acceptable strategies to help in the writing process. Some of this work can be completed at home or in core classes, if time is a critical issue. Allow 30 minutes or more, if necessary to complete the essay. Students may use notebook paper or provide them with fixed paper to limit the length of the essay. Remind them of the required components...thesis and support with at least three primary data selections.

Assessing the essays can be done at teacher discretion.

### **History Lab Procedures:**

#### **Step One:**

##### **The Hook**

“The Distribution of Slaves: 1820”

**Directions:** The purpose of The Hook exercise is to create some initial interest in the resource based inquiry. The distribution map actually presents both sides or answers to the question “Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?” While slavery still existed in many parts of the nation and especially in the South in 1820, including Jefferson’s state of Virginia, slavery was discouraged and legally forbidden in the Northwest Territories as stated in the Northwest Ordinances that Jefferson presented. Distribute Resource Sheet #01, “The Hook” to all students.

1. Allow the students to work in pairs or small groups and examine the map.
2. Encourage them to write the answers to the guide questions beneath the map.
3. Instruct them to be prepared to discuss with the class if the map convinces them that Jefferson supported slavery or opposed it.
4. Do they notice regional patterns or the effects of time on the locations where slavery seems to be widely or hardly practiced?

#### **Questions:**

1. What generalization can you make about the distribution of slaves in the United States in 1820?

**Slavery is still widely practiced in the South in 1820, especially in eastern states.**

**Other Southern states and some Northern states have less slaves and several**

**Northern states have few or no slaves at all.**

2. Are there any states on the map that have information that surprises you? Explain.

**Some Northern states, like Pennsylvania, have some slaves while New York has as many as some Southern states.**

3. Thomas Jefferson helped to write the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. How was slavery treated in those areas?

**Some parts of the Territory have limited numbers of slaves, while other parts have made slavery illegal altogether.**

4. Thomas Jefferson helped to secure the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. How was slavery treated in that area?

**In the earliest states that were carved from the Louisiana Territory, more Southern states, like Louisiana, have more slaves, while Arkansas and Missouri, further north, have fewer.**

5. How might this map be used as proof to help answer the question, “Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?”

**While Jefferson may have argued against slavery in new territories, especially in the North, he was content to allow it to remain a part of the economic and social condition for old Southern states and new Southern states and territories. His stance seems to change as his political career moved from state legislator in 1787 to president in 1800-1808.**

## **Step Two:**

### **Establishing the Context and Content**

#### Background Essay and Timeline

#### **General Instructions:**

1. Distribute Resource Sheet #02, “Where Did Thomas Jefferson Stand on the Issue of Slavery?” (Background Essay)
2. Provide a timeline of interesting and context related dates from the era mentioned in the Jefferson inquiry (see below).
3. Provide a list of key vocabulary terms and definitions that students may encounter in the context reading.
4. Encourage students to use and answer the guide questions that are provided to increase understanding of the content.
5. Allow students to read the essay silently, in pairs, or with the teacher out loud.

#### **Background Essay Questions/Answers**

1. How many different political positions did Thomas Jefferson hold in his lifetime?  
**Delegate to the Virginia House of Burgesses, Governor of Virginia, Delegate to the Continental Congress, Minister to France, Secretary of State, Vice-President, President.**
2. What political methods did Jefferson use to oppose slavery?  
**Writing laws-Northwest Ordinance, outlawing international slave trade.  
Manumitting his own slaves.  
Planning to establish African colonies for liberated slaves.**

3. What did Jefferson do to support the institution on slavery?  
**Owning slaves.**  
**Allowing slavery in some western territories.**
4. How many different political positions did Thomas Jefferson hold in his lifetime?  
**Several at both the local, state and national level.**  
**Member of the Virginia Legislature, Governor of Virginia, Ambassador to France, Secretary of State, Vice-President and President of the United States.**
5. What political methods did Jefferson use to oppose slavery?  
**Jefferson wrote, co-wrote and sponsored several pieces of legislation that limited the existence or expansion of slavery to new territories and states. He also wrote personal correspondence that argued against slavery on moral grounds.**
6. What did Jefferson do to support the institution on slavery?  
**As a President he dismissed the issue of slavery when it was presented as a national concern. He maintained his loyal supporters in the South and avoided sectional conflict by excluding slavery as an issue in the Louisiana Purchase. In his post presidency personal correspondence, he argued against the abolition of slavery, citing it as a potential issue of sectional political and economic conflict.**
7. Define any bold words or vocabulary words that you may not know. Work with a partner or work alone.

### **Timeline of Key Events**

**1776:** Thomas Jefferson is the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.

**1783:** The Treaty of Paris secures much new land for the new United States.

**1794:** Eli Whitney patents the cotton gin.

**1800:** Thomas Jefferson is elected the third President of the United States.

**1803:** Jefferson purchases the Louisiana Territory from France for \$15,000,000.

**1807:** Jefferson and Congress issue the Embargo Act to protect American shipping.

**1812:** War with England begins.

**1820:** The Missouri Compromise temporarily solves the issue of slavery in new states.

**1824:** John Quincy Adams becomes the sixth president in the "Corrupt Bargain."

**1826:** Jefferson and John Adams both die on the same day, July 4, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.



### **Step Three:**

#### **Understanding the Question and Pre-Writing Organization**

With most middle school students, specific writing expectations should be presented before they begin to create their essay. Tell the students to choose an argument that they can develop, but only after examining the resources. They should decide if Jefferson stood “for” slavery or “against” it. Was he a supporter of slavery or an opponent of slavery? Discuss several motives that may be considered or included in their argument such as personal, moral, political and economic examples. Students should also be given a number of arguments or examples to cite in their writing. A good number in this case would be 3. That would allow for a true development of the thesis and provide ample potential to find supporting data. Lastly, encourage them to cite examples from the data, when they write. Use phrases like, “According to the letter...” or “In the drawing I noticed...” etc. Cognitive webbing, outlining and other pre-writing strategies may help in the planning.

### **Step Four:**

#### **Document Analysis**

Resource Sheets #3 - #16 (Student and Teacher Pages are provided)

Re-define the terms primary and secondary source documents and provide generic examples of each in an attempt to focus the analysis of each document. Provide a set of analysis questions to help in the understanding of each document, or provide a chart that helps to organize the interpretive data that each document provides and discuss each category that the students are expected to complete. It is probably a good idea to sample at least one document together, as a class to make sure that all students are clear as to the procedure. It might also be a good idea to choose one document that shows support for slavery and one that shows opposition. In that case, students may begin to mentally choose sides.

Choose the desired number of documents based on time and the ability of the class. Determine the readability of the language and the potential challenges that low readers may encounter. Be sure to offer selected documents that would inspire discussion of both sides of the slave issue and Jefferson’s attitudes. Have the students work individually, in pairs or small groups to analyze each document and complete the questions or the chart. Students should be grouped with ability levels in mind. In some of my classes, I will create pairs with one strong reader and a partner that may struggle to read. Form groups with a balance of strong and weak readers as well. After adequate time has been given, open full class discussion of all or only selected documents. It is recommended that a chart or matrix is used to analyze the documents.

**Answer keys are provided for each page of the document resource (Teacher Page).**

### **Step Five:**

#### **“Pre-Writing, Bucketing, or Chicken Foot”**

The choice of pre-writing strategies can vary. Some teachers may use an outline form. Others may use the DBQ (Document-Based Question) strategies of “Bucketing” and “The Chicken Foot.” Those that prefer can use computer-based programs such as *Inspiration* to web ideas for

writing. Regardless, encourage the students to select a thesis based on the sources and plan their writing before the actual finished product.

**Use this list and the corresponding documents (Resource Sheets #3 - #16) to determine which arguments should be made.**

**Thomas Jefferson was a supporter of slavery:**

1. Despite limiting slavery in the Northwest Territories, Jefferson hesitated to change it in existing Southern States.
2. The Runaway Slave ad reinforced Jefferson's regard of slaves as valuable property, to be captured and returned for reward.
3. Jefferson did not admire the natural abilities or talents of Africans.
4. Jefferson was wary of slave uprisings, and preferred to keep Africans enslaved for safety reasons.
5. Jefferson may have had a relationship with one of his servants, but refused to acknowledge it publicly.
6. Jefferson feared abolition for political reasons and believed that it would permanently divide the nation.
7. Jefferson owned slaves for more than 50 years despite expressions of disdain for the institution.

**Thomas Jefferson was an opponent of slavery:**

1. Jefferson often wrote in great documents about the American virtues of liberty and equality.
2. Jefferson freed many of his own slaves and provided better than adequate accommodations for them.
3. Jefferson acknowledged the talents of several African-American artists and scientists.
4. In many of his letters, Jefferson criticized his political and business peers for their failure to condemn slave labor and promote free labor in their businesses.

**Step Six:**

**From Thesis to Essay Writing**

Answering the Overarching Question of the History Lab

This is a good time to address any clarification and discussion of the issue before creating the essay. Students may use any pre-writing strategy that works for them; cognitive webs, outlines and bulleted lists are all acceptable strategies to help in the writing process. Some of this work can be completed at home or in core classes, if time is a critical issue. Allow 30 minutes or more, if necessary to complete the essay. Students may use notebook paper or provide them with fixed paper to limit the length of the essay. Remind them of the required components...thesis and support with at least three primary data selections.

Assessing the essays can be done at teacher discretion.

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