

Issues of Slavery



Time Line overview

- 1444 • *Mercado de Escravos* the first slave market is created in Portugal
- 1501 • The first African-born slaves are taken to the island colony of Hispaniola
- 1552 • Ten percent of the population in Lisbon, Portugal is classified as slaves
- 1555 • John Lok brings slaves to England for the first time
- 1563 • Together English-born Sir Francis Drake and John Hawkins devise plan to sell slaves off the African coasts to the Spanish Colonies; their profits help establish England's dominance in the slave trade and begins Transatlantic Slave Triangle
- 1619 • First shipment of slaves arrive in the colony Jamestown
- 1650 • First coffee houses open in England
- 1660 • Royal African Company, London-based trading company, is granted a monopoly over slave trade, backed by the Stuart Royal House
- 1791 • Slave Revolt in Haiti
- 1804 • The American South grows 60 percent of the world's cotton and provides 70 percent of the cotton consumed by the British textile industry.

Thomas Jefferson and Emancipation

Letter to Edward Coles

Thomas Jefferson

August 25, 1814

Monticello

DEAR SIR,— Your favour of July 31, was duly received, and was read with peculiar pleasure. **The sentiments breathed through the whole do honor to both the head and heart of the writer. Mine on the subject of slavery of negroes have long since been in possession of the public, and time has only served to give them stronger root. The love of justice and the love of country plead equally the cause of these people, and it is a moral reproach to us that they should have pleaded it so long in vain, and should have produced not a single effort, nay I fear not much serious willingness to relieve them & ourselves from our present condition of moral & political reprobation.** From those of the former generation who were in

the fulness of age when I came into public life, which was while our controversy with England was on paper only, I soon saw that nothing was to be hoped. Nursed and educated in the daily habit of seeing the degraded condition, both bodily and mental, of those unfortunate beings, not reflecting that that degradation was very much the work of themselves & their fathers, few minds have yet doubted but that they were as legitimate subjects of property as their horses and cattle. The quiet and monotonous course of colonial life has been disturbed by no alarm, and little reflection on the value of liberty. And when alarm was taken at an enterprize on their own, it was not easy to carry them to the whole length of the principles which they invoked for themselves. In the first or second session of the Legislature after I became a member, I drew to this subject the attention of Col. Bland, one of the oldest, ablest, & most respected members, and he undertook to move for

Thomas Jefferson and Emancipation

certain moderate extensions of the protection of the laws to these people. I seconded his motion, and, as a younger member, was more spared in the debate; but he was denounced as an enemy of his country, & was treated with the grossest indecorum. From an early stage of our revolution other & more distant duties were assigned to me, so that from that time till my return from Europe in 1789, and I may say till I returned to reside at home in 1809, I had little opportunity of knowing the progress of public sentiment here on this subject. **I had always hoped that the younger generation receiving their early impressions after the flame of liberty had been kindled in every breast, & had become as it were the vital spirit of every American, that the generous temperament of youth, analogous to the motion of their blood, and above the suggestions of avarice, would have sympathized with oppression wherever found, and proved their love of liberty beyond their own share of it.** But my intercourse with them, since my return has not been sufficient to ascertain that they had made towards this point the progress I had hoped. Your solitary but welcome voice is the first which has brought this sound to my ear; and I have considered the general silence which prevails on this subject as indicating an apathy unfavorable to every hope. **Yet the hour of emancipation is advancing, in the march of time. It will come; and whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds; or by the bloody process of St. Domingo¹, excited and conducted by the power of our present enemy², if once stationed permanently within our Country, and offering asylum & arms to the oppressed, is a leaf of our history not yet turned over.** As to the method by which this difficult work is to be effected, if permitted to be done by ourselves, I have seen no proposition so expedient on the whole, as that as emancipation of those born after a given day, and of their education

1. Jefferson is referring to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) which led to the elimination of slavery and the establishment of Haiti as the first republic ruled by people of African ancestry. 2. Britain: The War of 1812 is still on-going.

Thomas Jefferson and Emancipation

and expatriation after a given age. This would give time for a gradual extinction of that species of labour & substitution of another, and lessen the severity of the shock which an operation so fundamental cannot fail to produce. **For men probably of any color, but of this color we know, brought from their infancy without necessity for thought or forecast, are by their habits rendered as incapable as children of taking care of themselves, and are extinguished promptly wherever industry is necessary for raising young. In the mean time they are pests in society by their idleness, and the depredations to which this leads them. Their amalgamation with the other color produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent.**³ I am sensible of the partialities with which you have looked towards me as the person who should undertake this salutary but arduous work. But this, my dear sir, is like bidding old Priam

to buckle the armour of Hector “tremantibus aequo humeris et inutile ferruncingi.” No, I have overlived the generation with which mutual labors & perils begat mutual confidence and influence. This enterprise is for the young; for those who can follow it up, and bear it through to its consummation. It shall have all my prayers, & these are the only weapons of an old man. But in the mean time are you right in abandoning this property, and your country with it? I think not. **My opinion has ever been that, until more can be done for them, we should endeavor, with those whom fortune has thrown on our hands, to feed and clothe them well, protect them from all ill usage, require such reasonable labor only as is performed voluntarily by freemen, & be led by no repugnancies to abdicate them, and our duties to them. The laws do not permit us to turn them loose, if that were for their good: and to commute them for other property is to commit them to those whose us-**

3. Jefferson believes the events in Haiti suggests all “Negroes” are prone to reactionary violence. He is also concerned with the mixing of race. This individual passage, taken out of context, is often quoted to show Jefferson as a contradictory figure of history.

Thomas Jefferson and Emancipation

age of them we cannot control. I hope then, my dear sir, you will reconcile yourself to your country and its unfortunate condition; that you will not lessen its stock of sound disposition by withdrawing your portion from the mass. That, on the contrary you will come forward in the public councils, become the missionary of this doctrine truly christian; insinuate & inculcate it softly but steadily, through the medium of writing and conversation; associate others in your labors, and when the phalanx is formed, bring on and press the proposition perseveringly until its accomplishment. It is an encouraging observation that no good measure was ever proposed, which, if duly pursued, failed to prevail in the end. We have proof of this in the history of the endeavors in the English parliament to suppress that very trade which brought this evil on us. And you will be supported by the religious precept, “be not weary in well-doing.”

That your success may be as speedy & complete, as it will be of honorable & immortal consolation to yourself, I shall as fervently and sincerely pray as I assure you of my great friendship and respect.

Slavery

Virginia Slave Laws, 1660-1669

Throughout the seventeenth century, indentured servants, who agreed to work for a stated number of years in return for their passage to the New World, were a convenient source of labor for the American colonies. Both Negroes and whites served under the system. White servants, after working out their period of indenture, often rose to respected positions in the community. However, Negroes, who numbered about 2,000 in Virginia in 1670, were seldom accorded the same treatment. By the middle of the century they were generally considered servants for life. In the late 1650s, laws referring to slaves began to appear in the Virginia statutes; the following sampling of Virginia laws, passed between 1660 and 1669, clearly marks the distinction between white servants and Negro slaves.

“Virginia Slave Laws.” *The Annals of America: 1493-1754, Discovering a New World*. Vol. I. Mortimer Adler, Ed. London: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1976. Print.

Slavery

On Running Away with Negroes (March 1660)

Be it enacted that in case any English servant shall run away in company with any Negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by addition of time... the English so running away in company with them shall serve for the time of the said Negroes' absence as they are to do for their own by a former act.

On the Nativity Conditions of Slavery (December 1662)

Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free, be it therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly, that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother; and that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a Negro man or woman, he or she so offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the former act.

Slavery

On Baptism and Bondage (September 1667)

Whereas some doubts have risen whether children that are slaves by birth, and by the charity and piety of their owners made partakers of the blessed sacrament of baptism, should by virtue of their baptism be made free, it is enacted and declared by this Grand Assembly, and the authority thereof, that the conferring of baptism does not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom; that diverse masters, freed from this doubt may more carefully endeavor the propagation of Christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or chose of greater growth if capable, to be admitted to that sacrament.

On Corporal Punishment (September 1668)

Whereas it has been questioned whether servants running away may be punished with corporal punishment by their master or magistrate, since the act already made gives the master satisfaction by prolonging their time by service, it is declared and enacted by this Assembly that moderate corporal punishment inflicted

Slavery

by master or magistrate upon a runaway servant shall not deprive the master of the satisfaction allowed by the law, the one being as necessary to reclaim them from persisting in that idle course as the other is just to repair the damages sustained by the master.

On the Killing of Slaves (October 1669)

Whereas the only law in force for the punishment of refractory servants resisting their master, mistress, or overseer cannot be inflicted upon Negroes, nor the obstinacy of many of them be suppressed by other than violent means, be it enacted and declared by this Grand Assembly if any slave resists his master (or other by his master's order correcting him) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that his death shall not be accounted a felony, but the master (or that other person appointed by the master to punish him) be acquitted from molestation, since it cannot be presumed that premeditated malice (which alone makes murder a felony) should induce any man to destroy his own estate.

Slavery

Transatlantic slave trade

- Slavery was prominent elsewhere in Africa long before the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade.
- In 1444 the first slave market was created in Portugal for the sale of imported African slaves - called the *Mercado de Escravos*.
- By the year 1552 black African slaves made up 10 percent of the population of the capital city Lisbon in Portugal.
- In the second half of the 1500s the focus of European trade of African slaves shifted. The emphasis changed from importing slaves to European locations; the new strategy was to transport slaves to tropical colonies in the Americas.
- Originally New World natives were used as forced labor in Spanish colonies— but due to population declines from disease and mistreatment, psychological abuse, the Spanish colonists relied on the Atlantic slave trade.

Slavery

England played a prominent role in the Atlantic slave trade.

- The “slave triangle” was pioneered by Francis Drake and John Hawkins.
- To generalize, England supplied money and ships to transport slaves from Africa bound for English and Spanish agricultural colonies in the New World which produced goods to be shipped back to England:

- > rum

- > cotton

- > coffee

- > cocoa

- > tobacco

- > sugar

According to historian Roger Anstey, 75% of all sugar produced in the English plantations ended up in London for the popular coffee houses.

Slavery

Slavery was a legal institution in all of the 13 American colonies.

- Profits of the slave trade and of West Indian plantations amounted to 5% of the British economy by the time of the Industrial Revolution.
- However, the Transatlantic slave trade peaked in the late 18th century at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.
- Although the Transatlantic slave trade itself ended shortly after the Revolution, slavery remained a central economic institution in the Southern states.
- The Northern states passed emancipation acts between 1780 and 1804; most of these arranged for gradual emancipation.

Slavery

Slave expeditions were typically carried out by African warlords.

- The slaves were brought to coastal outposts along the west coast of Africa where they were traded for goods: guns, agricultural supplies, and money.
- An estimated 10-12 million Africans were shipped to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th centuries.
- Of these, an estimated 645,000 were brought to what is now the United States.
- According to the 1860 U.S. census, approximately 400 thousand people owned 3 million slaves (393,975 individuals owned 3,950,528 slaves).
- The largest number of slaves transported during these times were ships heading to Brazil.