

Discover

The Deleted Passage

SLAVERY AND THE CONTRADICTION INSIDE INDEPENDENCE

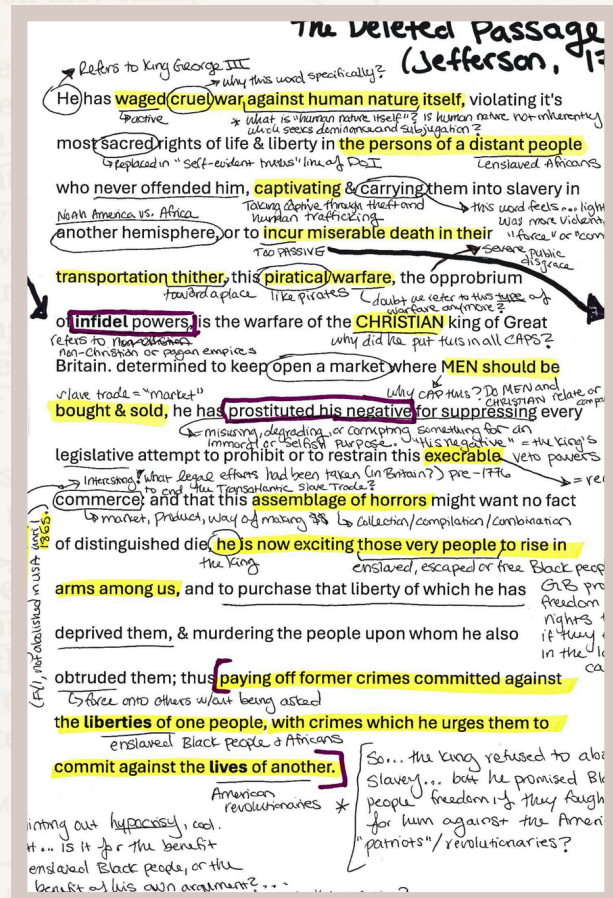
IN HIS FIRST DRAFT of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote a tirade "on slavery." It was removed from the final version. Today, this passage is often referred to as the "deleted passage on slavery."

But was the passage actually saying something different?

A question for close reading and classroom discussion.

Download Annotations

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Introduction to Expert Annotations “

ES Resources has designed an Ethnic Studies praxis that uses historical inquiry and close reading to teach students how, what, and when to annotate primary sources. **These activities are organized around recurring habits of historical thinking rather than isolated historical facts.** Students practice the rigorous work of historians: examine evidence, identify perspective, situate authors and arguments within historical context, weigh competing interpretations, and support claims with evidence. These habits intentionally recur in our instructional materials so that students gradually assume greater responsibility as teacher scaffolds are removed.

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The Deleted Passage (Jefferson, 1776)

Refers to King George III
 He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither, this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

Handwritten annotations include:

- Left margin:** "current conceives the merit of indigenous lands to spread Christianity and from European colonization as religiously just."
- Top right:** "what is 'human nature itself'? is human nature not inherently that which seeks dominance and subjugation?"
- Below "cruel war":** "active", "what is 'human nature itself'? is human nature not inherently that which seeks dominance and subjugation?"
- Below "most sacred rights":** "placed in 'self-evident truths' line of DoI"
- Below "captivating & carrying them into slavery":** "Taking captive through theft and human trafficking", "this word feels... light. It was more violent, like 'force' or 'compulse'"
- Below "piratical warfare":** "like pirates", "doubt we refer to this type of warfare anymore?"
- Below "CHRISTIAN king":** "why did he put this in all CAPS?"
- Below "MEN should be bought & sold":** "slave trade = 'market'", "why CAP this? Do MEN and CHRISTIAN relate or compare?"
- Below "prostituted his negative":** "misusing, degrading, or corrupting something for an immoral or selfish purpose. 'this negative' = the king's veto powers"
- Below "execrable":** "why CAP this? Do MEN and CHRISTIAN relate or compare?"
- Below "assemblage of horrors":** "what legal efforts had been taken (in Britain?) pre-1776", "to end the Transatlantic slave trade?"
- Below "commerce":** "market, product, way of making sth", "Collection/compilation/combination"
- Below "he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us":** "the King", "enslaved, escaped or free Black people?", "GB promised freedom and rights to them if they existed in the loyalist cause."
- Bottom left:** "British Parliament abolished slave trade in 1807. Abolished slavery entirely b/w 1833-1834. (PA), not abolished in USA until 1865"
- Bottom right:** "So... the king refused to abolish slavery... but he promised Black people freedom if they fought for him against the American 'patriots' / revolutionaries?"
- Bottom center:** "pointing out hypocrisy, cool. But... is it for the benefit of enslaved Black people, or the benefit of his own argument?"



Example of an ES Resources “Expert Annotations” handout.

Student Questions

Learning Excerpts

CLOSE READING / DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1

Jefferson criticizes King George III for blocking efforts to restrict the slave trade. What is the difference between outlawing the Transatlantic Slave Trade and abolishing slavery itself? Why is this distinction important for understanding Jefferson's argument?

2

Jefferson describes an "open market where MEN should be bought & sold." What is Jefferson criticizing about commerce in this sentence? How does the language of markets and buying and selling change when the "goods" are human beings?

3

Throughout this passage, Jefferson uses very different language when describing King George III and enslaved Africans. Compare the verbs used for each. Which actions are described actively? Which actions are described passively?

4

In the final sentence, Jefferson criticizes King George III for encouraging Black people to fight against the American colonies. At this time in history, the Black community in the American colonies included enslaved, escaped, and free people. How are Black people in the American colonies portrayed in this paragraph? Do they appear as independent actors making choices, or as people being used by others? Explain using evidence from the text.

THE DELETED PASSAGE

SLAVERY, CONTRADICTION, AND THE ASSIGNMENT OF BLAME

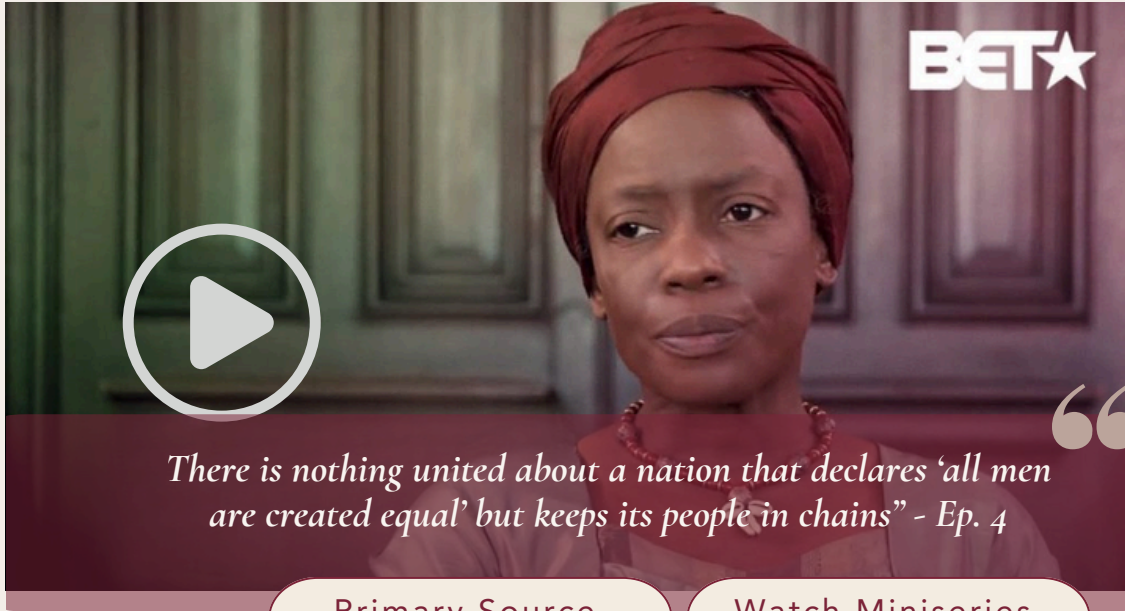
[Download Questions](#)

The complete activity handout has more than a dozen questions to choose from!

MINISERIES

The Book of Negroes

The British Army made proclamations of freedom for Black people who joined the British cause during the American Revolutionary War. While the policy had major limitations, approximately 3,000 formerly enslaved Black Loyalists were provided transport out of the newly established United States of America.



Aminata Diallo's is a harrowing life story — from **being kidnapped in West Africa at age 11 to surviving enslavement in South Carolina**, helping the British record names in the historic "**Book of Negroes**," and traveling to **Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone** — the show brings real, historical experiences to life with a fictional protagonist. *The Book of Negroes* is based on a historical fiction novel by Canadian novelist Lawrence Hill. However, between 1783-84 a British military ledger called the "Book of Negroes" really did record the names, ages, physical descriptions, and claims to freedom of about 3,000 Black Loyalists who were granted passage by the British out of the newly formed United States of America.

*Teacher discretion is advised, as some scenes will not be appropriate for all students. Please refer to the [ESResources.org](https://www.esresources.org) [resource page](#) for guidance on teaching *The Book of Negroes: Miniseries*.*

The “Slave Bible”

The Slave Bible was a heavily edited version of the standard Protestant Christian Bible specifically created for enslaved Africans in the British Caribbean during the early 1800s. It was altered: the “Slave Bible” redacted entire verses, stories, and chapters, including 90 percent of the Hebrew Bible and 50 percent of the New Testament.

- It was published in London in 1807 by a missionary organization that sought to convert enslaved Black people to Christianity while removing the stories and quotes about freedom, liberation, equality, or emancipation (freedom from enslavement).
- The editors deliberately omitted passages that emphasized freedom, equality, or liberation, while keeping passages that encouraged obedience and submission.
- It portrayed a version of Christian scripture that supported the plantation system rather than challenged it.

Who created the “Slave Bible”?

Who was its intended audience?

What information was omitted — and why?

How might those omissions change the reader's understanding of Christianity, freedom, and enslavement?

[Learn More](#)

