

The Deleted Passage

STUDENT HANDOUT

Slavery, Contradiction, and the Assignment of Blame

What's inside?

- Deleted Passage “On Slavery” from the Declaration of Independence – Thomas Jefferson’s first draft
 - Expert Annotations Copy
 - Blank Copy
- Student Questions (20 total), including both “First Read” and “Second Read” sets
- Active/Passive Word Choice Activity

The materials in this handout are suited for high school Ethnic Studies courses, English language and literature, U.S. history – including American slavery, Black / African American history, Revolutionary War, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, British colonial rule, Early U.S., and the Declaration of Independence.

Support Note: *If you are teaching these materials in Los Angeles County and would like an ES Resources representative to assist with your planning or classroom application, please email contact@ESResources.org.*



The Deleted Passage (Jefferson, 1776)

Refers to King George III
→ why this word specifically?

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's
↳ active
↳ what is human nature itself? is human nature not inherently that which seeks dominion and subjugation?

most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people
↳ captured in "self-existent truth" line of DoI

who never offended him, capturing & carrying them into slavery in
↳ enslaved Africans

North America vs. Africa
↳ taking slaves through trafficking
↳ another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their
↳ "force" or "compared"

transportation thither, this piratical warfare, the opprobrium
↳ severe public disgrace

of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great
↳ doubt we refer to two types of warfare and more?
↳ why did he put this in all caps?

Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be
↳ why CAPTIVES? Do MEN and women have equal value?
↳ why CAPTIVES? Do MEN and women have equal value?

bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every
↳ why CAPTIVES? Do MEN and women have equal value?

legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable
↳ immoral or deplorable purpose. "His negative" = the king's veto powers

commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact
↳ interesting, what legal efforts had been taken in Britain? pre-1776
↳ to end the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in
↳ market, product, way of making things by collection/compilation/combination

arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has
↳ the king
↳ enslaved, escaped or free Black people?

deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also
↳ freedom and rights to them
↳ if they enlisted in the loyalist cause.

obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against
↳ force onto others what being asked

the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to
↳ enslaved Black people & Africans

commit against the lives of another.
↳ American revolutionaries *

Pointing out hypocrisy, and.
↳ But... is it for the benefit of enslaved Black people, or the benefit of his own argument?...
↳ Are they mutually exclusive?

British Parliament abolished slave trade in 1807. Abolished slavery entirely by 1833-1834.
↳ FYI, not abolished in USA until 1863.

European colonization as spread Christianity and from of indigenous lands to defend/rationalize the theft of land/evangelism to itself. "Basically, used and brought to the faith could be colonized, 'nobleman' (called 'barbarous natives') by non-Christians (whom he lands inhabited/occupied (1493) = Pope declared as Doctrine of Discovery

"Incur" = to bring a consequence, but this punning implies the death happened during travel/transport to captured & stolen Africans. Why did death happen? Who enacted the violence that led to death? That is where I want to see his class King George III. "Normal" people participated.

So... the king refused to abolish slavery... but he promised Black people freedom. If they fought for him against the American "patriots"/revolutionaries?

FIRST READ QUESTIONS

On Slavery

Thomas Jefferson (1776)

1. Who does Jefferson mean by "He"?
2. Who are the "distant people" Jefferson describes? (*Extra credit:* Why might he choose not to name them directly?)
3. 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 inside the nation?** Why is this distinction important for understanding Jefferson's argument?
4. 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?
5. In this passage, the words **CHRISTIAN** and **MEN** are the only words written in all capital letters. Why do you think Jefferson chose to emphasize these two words? What relationship is he describing between Christian affiliation and human equality?
6. 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.

Word Choice: Passive or Active?

1. Jefferson says King George "waged cruel war against human nature itself." Why not simply say he supported slavery? What does this wording emphasize instead?
2. Jefferson writes that Africans were "captivated." Define that term. (*Extra credit:* How does "captivated" compare to other options he could have used, like *kidnapped*, *abducted*, or *stolen*?)
3. Jefferson writes that enslaved Africans would "incur miserable death." Does his phrasing clearly identify what and who caused those deaths?
4. Jefferson describes the slave trade as an "assemblage of horrors." Why might he choose this phrase instead of simply calling slavery evil? (*Extra credit:* What word would you have used instead?)

Jefferson uses very different language when describing King George III and enslaved Africans. Using the blank version of "The Deleted Passage," compare the verbs he uses for each.

Part A:

- Which actions are described actively? Find 5 and highlight in Color 1 (or underline).
- Which actions are described passively? Find 5 and highlight in Color 2 (or circle).

Part B: Choose **three words or phrases** that describe what was done *to* enslaved Africans but may be currently phrased as passive or indirect.

- Rewrite each phrase using language that sounds more direct and would still be historically accurate. Example: "captivating" → "taken captive by" or "kidnapped" In two or more sentences, explain why you made each change and what effect you intended the change to have.

Part C: Choose **three words or phrases** Jefferson uses to attack King George III.

- Replace each with a more neutral word or phrase. Example: "cruel" → "harmful" or "war against human nature" → "human rights violations" Do you think your change is more or less effective than the original? Why or why not?

Part D: Re-read your new, revised version with the six language changes.

- How did changing Jefferson's language affect the overall tone of the passage?
- Would your version be more or less effective to an audience in 1776 than Jefferson's? Why or why not?
- To whom would your version be *most* convincing and why?
- To whom would it be *least* convincing and why?

Thomas Jefferson's early draft of the Declaration of Independence included a notable paragraph, attacking King George III for allowing the Transatlantic Slave Trade to continue. During the Continental Congress's revision process to Jefferson's draft, they removed the bulk of the paragraph and left a veiled reference against slavery elsewhere, complaining that King George incited "domestic insurrections among us." Later, Jefferson claimed that some delegates from northern and southern colonies had objected to the original paragraph and prompted its removal. Source: American Battlefield Trust

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.

SECOND READ QUESTIONS

On Slavery

Thomas Jefferson (1776)

1. Jefferson criticizes King George for blocking efforts to restrict the slave trade. What historical events or debates might Jefferson expect his readers to know that we need to research today? Consult the Expert Annotator's notes.
2. What does Jefferson mean that Britain was creating an "open market" where people were "bought & sold"?
3. Why do you think Jefferson repeatedly places responsibility on King George III rather than on colonial enslavers?
4. Why might Jefferson have believed this argument would persuade readers in 1776?
5. Which words or phrases seem designed to provoke an emotional response? Explain why you think so.
6. What questions does this passage leave unanswered? What perspectives are left unrepresented?