



Lesson Title: Slavery: Colonial America's and the World's

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.1, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History

Era: Colonial

Areas of Focus: Slavery, African American Experience

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of the Atlantic slave trading system in relationship to the other forms of slavery in world history.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the six sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views, while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Slavery: Colonial America's and the World's: Background Essay

Starting in the early 1600s, England began to establish several colonies on the coast of North America. Virginia was founded in 1607. Thirteen of these colonies in time formed the United States of America. It was a land full of promise. Yet from the start, it had two deep and tragic flaws -- the seizing of lands from indigenous tribes and the heavy reliance on systems of slavery. The first enslaved Africans likely arrived in 1619, also in Virginia. Soon slavery would exist in all the colonies. It would not be abolished throughout the United States until 1865.

Until then, some Americans could hold other Americans as slaves. Enslaved people were treated as property, to be bought, sold and put to work for their slaveholders for life. Treated well or treated harshly, they were totally unfree. They lived their entire lives under someone else's control. Today, many ask how such obvious evil and injustice could be tolerated by anyone., especially by so many in a nation claiming to be based on the liberty and equality of every individual.

To better understand this phenomenon, it may help to realize that slavery was long seen to be a normal part of social life. It existed for thousands of years in most major societies – ancient Babylon, China, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, the Muslim lands of the Middle East, and many African societies. People knew that being held as a slave was a terrible fate. No one wanted that fate for themselves. However, for most of human history, life was hard for nearly everyone. Famine, disease, warfare and other calamities ensured a short and brutal life for many people. Moreover, many other groups in society besides enslaved people lived their lives under the control of others. Being a serf, a servant, or a client dependent on a more powerful person was the common fate of most people. Few people thought of themselves as free individuals. As a result, slavery may have simply seemed like the worst of many harsh and limiting ways of life. Before 1700, few people anywhere seemed to have questioned its morality.

Slavery has taken many forms, and many different groups of people have been forced into slavery. People taken as captives in war were often enslaved. Some people deeply in debt could be enslaved – and some sold themselves as a way to pay off debts. People suffering dire poverty even sold their own children into slavery. Others abandoned newborns they could not support so that others might find them and sell them into slavery.

Societies often enslaved some of their own people. However, more often they took them from far-off lands, or they enslaved groups who could be looked down on because of their cultural or religious differences. Almost always, the enslaved people were treated as inferior -- even when they did not look different from those enslaving them.

Systems of slavery also varied in the kinds of work enslaved people were forced to do. The late Roman Republic and the Roman Empire used war captives in huge numbers on large farms, in mines, as domestic servants, and as gladiators who fought to the death in the arena. They used enslaved people who were educated or skilled as artisans,

government accountants, doctors, teachers, entertainers. Racial differences were not that important to the Romans. They enslaved people from all the regions around them – from Britain, Germany, Syria, North Africa, the Balkans, etc.

In the Middle Ages, the use of enslaved labor in Europe declined. Serfs replaced them as the main class of poor peasants. Serfs were bound to the land and had to work for the lord who owned that land, but they could not be bought and sold as enslaved people were. However, Europeans did enslave some people and Europeans continued to capture people and sell them into slavery to others. For example, Europeans took part in the capture and sale of East European Slavs to both Christian and Muslim societies. The word “slave” comes from the name for this ethnic group.

Meanwhile, many Muslim societies sent raiders to the southern shores of Europe to capture and enslave Europeans. Enslaved people in Arab and other Muslim lands were used as domestic servants, eunuchs guarding harems, officials in governments and even as soldiers in slave armies. Muslim lands also enslaved millions of Sub-Saharan Africans over the course of many centuries. Enslaved Africans were often forced to work under harsh conditions on plantations, in mines, or draining salt marshes. Like most other societies, many African societies practiced slavery, and they cooperated with Arab traders. Those traders established long-lasting slave trade routes along the coast of East Africa and up across the Sahara Desert.

Starting in the 1400s, this system may have helped Europeans to develop their own much larger Atlantic slave trading system. It is this system Americans usually know best.

From the mid-1400s to the late 1800s, some 12 million Africans were seized and taken to the Americas. The Atlantic system linked African societies, Europe and the Americas in a vast trading network. Because so much is known about it, its horrors have been described in vivid and appalling detail. Some African nations warred constantly to capture other Africans and march them in chains to the coast. There they were sold to European merchants who packed them into slave ships for the long voyage to the Americas. We know from later abolitionist reports about the frightening conditions on board such ships. In the Caribbean, South and Central America, and in the southern United States, enslaved Africans were chattel slaves. That is, they were treated as property in every way, just as tools, saleable goods or domesticated animals were. They mainly produced cash crops on large plantations -- rice, tobacco, cotton and, above all, sugar. Sugar plantations and mills were run with factory-like discipline under a scorching sun. In the Caribbean and Brazil, many enslaved people died within less than five years of their arrival. As this plantation system spread, the gap widened between large numbers of enslaved Africans and small groups of wealthy whites. As this happened, racism against Africans also deepened. The growing divide between enslaved person and slaveholder made the system all the crueler.

For these reasons, some say this Atlantic slave trading system was the worst of all. Was it? This question is not easy to answer. After all, many varieties of slavery have existed

all over the world. Hopefully, the materials for this lesson will help you think about, discuss and debate this question.

Sources for this Lesson

Source 1. Hammurabi's Code.

Hammurabi was an ancient Babylonian king who ruled in the 1700s BCE. The law code he enacted contains 282 laws providing punishments for many specific crimes. Several laws describe relationships among enslaved people, free born men, freed men, royal and priestly officials, and others. Hammurabi's Code is available online at: [The Avalon Project : Code of Hammurabi \(yale.edu\)](#)

175. If a State slave or the slave of a freed man marry the daughter of a free man, and children are born, the master of the slave shall have no right to enslave the children of the free.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

204. If a freed man strike the body of another freed man, he shall pay ten shekels in money.

205. If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.

229. If a builder build a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.

230. If it kill the son of the owner the son of that builder shall be put to death.

231. If it kill a slave of the owner, then he shall pay slave for slave to the owner of the house.

Source 2. Aristotle on Slavery

Ancient Greece and Rome were major slaveholding societies. As in most other parts of the world, slavery was accepted as a normal part of society. Few regarded it as needing any defense. Greek philosopher Aristotle believed some men were "slaves by nature." His comparison of such "natural slaves" to animals was common in many cultures as an explanation for why some human beings could be enslaved. This passage is from Aristotle's "Treatise on Government." Available online at: [A Treatise on Government by Aristotle: Part 1 Chapter 5 - The Literature Page](#)

Tame animals are naturally better than wild ones, and it is advantageous that both should be under subjection to man; for this is productive of their common safety: so is it naturally with the male and the female; the one is superior, the other inferior; the one governs, the other is governed; and the same rule must necessarily hold good with respect to all mankind. Those men therefore who are as much inferior to others as the body is to the soul, are to be thus disposed of, as the proper use of them is their bodies, in which their excellence consists; and if what I have said be true, they are slaves by nature, and it is advantageous to them to be always under government.

Source 3. Diodorus Siculus on Slave Miners in Egypt

Diodorus Siculus was an ancient Greek writer in the 1st Century BCE. This is a passage in his *Bibliotheca Historica*, which means “Library of History.” In this huge multi volume history, Diodorus often used the writings of others. This passage is from Book Three, Chapter 13. It describes the condition of enslaved gold miners in Egypt.

Available online at: [LacusCurtius • Diodorus Siculus — Book III Chapters 1-14](http://LacusCurtius.com/Diodorus_Siculus_Book_III_Chapters_1-14) (uchicago.edu)

The boys there who have not yet come to maturity, entering through the tunnels into the galleries formed by the removal of the rock, laboriously gather up the rock as it is cast down piece by piece and carry it out into the open to the place outside the entrance. Then those who are above thirty years of age take this quarried stone from them and with iron pestles pound a specified amount of it in stone mortars, until they have worked it down to the size of a vetch [pea size]. Thereupon the women and older men receive from them the rock of this size and cast it into mills of which a number stand there in a row, and taking their places in groups of two or three at the spoke or handle of each mill they grind it until they have worked down the amount given them to the consistency of the finest flour. And since no opportunity is afforded any of them to care for his body and they have no garment to cover their shame, no man can look upon unfortunate wretches without feeling pity for them because of the exceeding hardships they suffer. For no leniency or respite of any kind is given to any man who is sick, or maimed, or aged, or in the case of a woman for her weakness, but all without exception are compelled by blows to persevere in their labours, until through ill-treatment they die in the midst of their tortures. Consequently the poor unfortunates believe, because their punishment is so excessively severe, that the future will always be more terrible than the present and therefore look forward to death as more to be desired than life.

Source 4. Ibn Khaldun on Africa South of the Sahara

Slavery was also common in ancient Muslim and Arab societies. Muslims enslaved many groups of people, including Europeans. They often gave enslaved Africans the hardest forms of labor in mines, draining marshes, etc. This passage about Africans south of the Sahara Desert is by Ibn Khaldun, an Arab historian of the 14th century. From Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1958) as translated by Franz Rosenthal, pp 118-119.

Beyond them [several known West African nations] to the south, there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings.

Source 5. The Atlantic Slave Trade

This passage is part of eyewitness testimony to a committee of the British House of Commons in 1790 and 1791 on conditions aboard ships carrying enslaved people from Africa to the Americas. From *The History of Slavery and The Slave Trade, Ancient and Modern*, Blake, W. O. H. Miller, Columbus, Ohio, 1860, pp. 127-128. Available online at: <http://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/historyofslaver00blak>

Captain Hall says, after the first eight or ten of them come on board, the men are put into irons. They are linked two and two together by the hands and feet, in which situation they continue till they arrive in the West Indies, except such as may be sick, whose irons are taken off. The women, however, he says, are not ironed. On being brought up in a morning, says Surgeon Wilson, an additional mode of securing them takes place, for to the shackles of each pair of them there is a ring, through which is reeved a large chain, which locks them all in a body to ring-bolts fastened to the deck. The time of their coming up in the morning, if fair, is described by Mr. Towne to be between eight and nine, and the time of their remaining there to be till four in the afternoon, when they are again put below till the next morning. In the interval of being upon deck they are fed twice. . . . After meals they are made to jump in their irons. This is called dancing by the slave-dealers.

On the subject of the stowage and its consequences, Dr. Trotter says that the slaves in the passage are so crowded below, that it is impossible to walk through them, without treading on them. Those who are out of irons are locked spoonways (in the technical phrase) to one another. It is the first mate's duty to see them stowed in this way every morning; those who do not get quickly into their places, are compelled by a cat-of-nine-tails. When the scuttles are obliged to be shut, the gratings are not sufficient for airing the rooms. He never himself could breath freely, unless immediately under the hatchway. He has seen the slaves drawing their breath with all those laborious and anxious efforts for life, which are observed in expiring animals, subjected by experiment to foul air, or in the exhausted receive of an air pump.

Source 6. Frederick Douglass: The Agony of an enslaved American

Frederick Douglass escaped slavery and became one of America's greatest abolitionist leaders. This passage is from his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Written by Himself, ed. Benjamin Quarles (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 94–95. Available online at: [The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, by Frederick Douglass; Chapter X Page 3 \(pagebypagebooks.com\)](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Frederick-Douglass/Chapter-X-Page-3)

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of six source documents provided. Finally, read the two “Point of View” paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take part in a class discussion about the nature of slavery, America’s and the world’s. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following question.

Essential Question: Were all slave systems equally terrible, or was the Atlantic slave system that the United States was part of worse than the others?

Point of View I: “Yes, the Atlantic Slave Trading System Was the Worst Ever.”

Every form of human bondage is a terrible evil, but what happened to black Africans during the Atlantic slave trade was uniquely horrible. First, consider the sheer size of the disruption. In four centuries, twelve million people were torn from Africa. They were transported thousands of miles across the sea. Their suffering was enormous. But think also of the disruption to the societies they were taken from: intensified warfare; political disruption; long-term loss of productive manpower. Many more men than women were taken, which added to the distortion of life for those left behind. Also, the passage across the sea was unique in its miseries: packed beneath deck in chains; dying by the scores on each voyage; allowed on deck during the day but made to “dance” or jump up and down to keep in some kind of shape. Many had no idea where they were going. Some knew a bit about the cultures and language of their captors. Most knew very little. This, too, was an extreme form of disruption compared to the experience of many enslaved peoples in other slave systems. Then there was the rigid discipline of plantation slavery. It was brutal in comparison to the kinds of work enslaved people elsewhere in the past had to do. Finally, this slave system was justified by a racist depiction of black Africans as inferior beings. This added profound wounds to enslaved people and their descendants. The legacy of this racism has long outlasted slavery itself in its destructive effects. Does it make it worse that America is the land of the free, while other nations were founded on the assumption that life is a huge power grab?

Point of View II: “No, all form of slavery were all horrible, each in its own way.”

Nothing is more disruptive to a culture than war. The thousands captured and enslaved during any war were ripped from their families and communities every bit as much as the Africans sent across the sea to the Americas. For example, Slavic peoples torn from homes in Eastern Europe were transported to Muslim Spain, North Africa and many parts of the Middle East. As for the horrors of plantation enslaved labor, what about the enslaved Africans (called the “Zanj”) draining swamps in what is now southern Iraq? In 869 CE, thousands of them rose up in a vast thirteen-year long revolt. Racist depictions of such Africans long pre-date the racism that arose during the Atlantic system. The war captives who labored on vast Roman estates often rebelled. Spartacus was an enslaved man from Thrace who led a vast slave revolt, 71-73 BCE. His skin color was no different than that of his enslavers. Some 6,000 of his followers were punished horribly for their uprising; they were all crucified. Even enslaved people with comfortable jobs as domestic servants, teachers, etc., were all still looked down on and deprived totally of

their liberty. Dishonoring and mocking such people took many forms. Physical appearance, religious beliefs, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, all could be a basis for such dishonoring. Every form of slavery was a terrible social reality. Thankfully, slavery is no longer acceptable or legal anywhere – even though forms of it still do exist.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about slavery, America's and the world's.

1. Of the six sources provided, list two that best support Point of View I.
2. Why did you choose those two sources?
3. Of the six sources provided, list two that best support Point of View II.
4. Why did you choose those two sources?
5. Which of the two points of view do you agree with more? Why?

Extension Activities:

Slavery Today

Tragically, some forms of slavery exist today. People are often surprised to hear about this. Slavery in the past was practiced openly and under protection of law. This makes learning about it and studying it easier. The fact that slavery is outlawed almost everywhere now makes it harder to investigate. Accurate numbers are not easy to come by. Some estimate that more than 40 million people are trapped in forms of forced labor that are like slavery or are in fact a form of slavery in every way. Many sources on modern slavery exist. Below is a brief video presentation and a report by the UN's

International Labor Organization. Together these are one way to start learning more about this problem.

“What Does Slavery Look Like Today?” A brief video presentation by the anti-slavery organization Free the Slaves.

[What Does Slavery Look Like Today? - YouTube](#)

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, a report of the International Labor Organization, Geneva, September 19, 2017. A pdf of the report is available online at: [Report: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage \(ilo.org\)](#)

Recommended Activity: Show the video presentation to the entire class. For students interested in pursuing the topic further, ask them to form a group, read and discuss the UN report and summarize its findings in a presentation to the entire class. The group can suggest ways for students to learn more about and become more involved in efforts to deal with this problem.



FOUNDATION
AGAINST
INTOLERANCE
& RACISM

Lesson Title: Race and Slavery in Colonial America: 1600-1763

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90-120 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.1, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History

Era: Colonial

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of how ideas about race contributed to forming the slave systems of colonial America.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the seven sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Race and Slavery in Colonial America, 1600-1763: Background Essay

For many decades, historians have argued about which came first in America, slavery or racism. That is, did colonists first start enslaving Africans or Native Americans and only later develop racist ideas about them? Or did they hold these racist ideas first and use them to justify enslaving people they already looked down on?

As you might guess, no easy answer to this question exists.

One reason for that has to do with the term “racism” itself and what we mean by it. The other has to do with how slavery seemed to change during the 1600s and 1700s in various places in the colonies that became the United States.

As for the term “racism,” even today people argue about it. Racism is one of those words people often use without a very specific idea of what they mean by it. By the 19th century, “race” had a scientific-sounding meaning. According to this meaning, races were separate groups of human beings each with its own fixed biological characteristics passed on to children. “Racism” then was the belief that some human groups, or races, were permanently inferior to others. This supposedly scientific concept of race did not exist in earlier centuries.

Nevertheless, Europeans in the 1500s and 1600s were aware of differences between themselves and other non-European people. And they did find ways to depict some of those people as inferior. Skin color and other physical features were part of these views. So were ideas about cultural and social differences. Religion also played a key role. Europeans saw Christianity as the one true religion. Africans and Native Americans had their own gods, spirits and beliefs. Even when they accepted Christianity, they often simply added it to the other beliefs they held. European Christians saw this as a failure to understand or accept truth and morality itself.

European Christians looked to the Bible itself to justify their disdain for Africans. The story of Noah and his sinful son Ham (or Cham) was used to explain African skin color. God punished Ham’s descendants. Many in Europe decided those descendants were the peoples of Africa. God supposedly marked them off by darkening their skin. In fact, the Bible story does not refer to Africa or to anyone’s skin color. However, many people associated the color black with evil, and this story about Noah may have drawn on such fears.

In fact, the Bible’s basic origin story viewed all of humanity as one, all descended from Adam and Eve. This meant that while the Bible could support slavery, it could also be used to oppose it. In the 1500s and 1600s, however, very few used the Bible to oppose slavery. That would change later, in the 1800s especially.

Africans were not the only people enslaved. Native Americans were as well. Many native tribes practiced forms of slavery, and often they captured and sold other indigenous people to English colonists. For example, South Carolina took in about 50,000 American Indians as slaves during its first four decades. They were often described as “barbarous,” “cruel,” “savage,” “vindictive” “naked,” “living in caves,” “lazy.” These were racist labels. But they were psychological and cultural terms, not fixed biological features. Skin color was not as important at first. The term “red men” was not used until later. At first, many colonists saw Indians as people who could be “improved” with education and exposure to “civilized” ways. This was less true of their attitudes about Africans.

Just as forms of racism varied, so also did forms of slavery in the colonies. In most of the colonies enslaved populations were small for a brief time of a few decades. During that time, controls over the lives of enslaved people were looser and less clearly defined. In Virginia and elsewhere many enslaved people worked in the same fields alongside their owners, white indentured servants, or others. Close ties to white family members often developed. Many of the enslaved had some freedom of movement, even a chance to raise crops on small plots and sell them in local markets. In cities such as Charleston in South Carolina or New York in the north, many worked in warehouses, on the docks, in homes as domestic servants, or as artisans. They had chances to mingle with free African Americans and others. The luckiest could earn money to purchase their freedom, marry and have children. Racially mixed marriages were not unheard of.

Of course, not many enslaved African Americans in any of the colonies were this lucky. Moreover, in time, ever fewer had these chances for some degree of independence. The brief looser period for enslaved people tightened as their numbers rose. This was true in all the colonies. It was especially so in Virginia and Maryland as tobacco plantations grew in size and in South Carolina as rice plantations were established. The social gap between plantation owners and their growing enslaved population widened. The labor demanded on such plantations was intense and rigidly controlled. In Virginia starting in the 1640s, a series of laws tightened control over more and more aspects of enslaved people's lives. These laws also often reinforced racist ideas about black Africans, enslaved or free.

A fear of slave uprisings certainly influenced planters in the South. However, even in urban settings the increasing enslaved populations provoked growing uneasiness. A slave uprising took place in New York City in 1712. In 1740, after a conspiracy there was uncovered, 31 enslaved people were executed. This was shortly after the 1739 uprising along the Stono River in South Carolina. That rebellion led to the deaths of 25 white colonists and 35 or more African Americans.

As slavery intensified so also did racist ideas seem to gain strength. The way these two forces interacted is the focus for this lesson. How central was racism to the development of America's slave system? The materials for this lesson will help you think about, discuss and debate this question.

Sources for this Lesson

Source 1 "Purity of the Blood"

Starting in the 1400s, Spain became one of the first European nations to import large numbers of Africans as slaves. Bigoted views about Jews may have influenced the way these Africans were looked down upon. Thousands of Jews in Spain had converted to Christianity to avoid being persecuted. These "Conversos" were often said to lack "purity of blood." That is, their Jewishness supposedly remained in their family lines whether they converted to Christianity or not. The idea of "purity of blood" may also have been used to support racist views about Africans in Spain. This can be seen in this passage from 1604 by Fray Prudencio de Sandoval.

As quoted in David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 72.

Who can deny that in the descendants of Jews there persists and endures the evil inclination of their ancient ingratitude and lack of understanding, just as in the Negroes [there is] the inseparability of their blackness. For if the latter should unite themselves a thousand times with white women, the children are born with the dark color of the father. Similarly, it is not enough for the Jew to be three parts aristocrat or Old Christian, for one family line [that is, one Jewish ancestor] alone defiles and corrupts him.

Source 2 Ham's Descendants

Christian Europe often used the story of Noah to explain the African's dark skin color. The Bible story itself does not mention skin color or Africans. But many claimed to find in it the idea that God cursed Noah's wicked son Ham's descendants by blackening their skin. Africans it was then said were those descendants. This passage is from George Best writing sometime in the late 1500s. From "A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie, for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya by the Northwest, (London: Henry Bynnyman, 1578), pp. 24–26. This version of the passage uses modernized spelling and capitalization. Available online at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230607330_34

There is some other cause than the climate, or the sun's perpendicular reflection, that should cause the Ethiopians great blackness. And the most probable cause to my judgment is, that this blackness proceeds from some natural infection of the first inhabitants of that country, and so all the whole progeny of them descended, are still polluted with the same blot of infection. Therefore, it shall not be far from our purpose, to examine the first original of these black men [that is, Ham's son Canaan], and how by lineal descent they have hitherto continued thus black. . . so black and loathsome, that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the world.

Source 3 "Looseness in Some Places"

At first, each British North American colony had only a few enslaved Africans. Evidence suggests they may have been somewhat less strictly controlled than would be the case later as plantation slavery expanded. This brief document is from South Carolina in 1706 (the colony was founded in 1670). In the document, several petitioners complain about the looseness they saw in some places in the colony. As quoted in Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Century of Slavery in North America*, Belknap Press, 1998, p. 70.

"For at this last election, Jews, Strangers, Sailors, Servants, Negroes & almost every French Man in Craven & Berkly County came down to elect, & their votes were taken."

Source 4 Two Acts Regarding Slavery by the Virginia General Assembly.

For the first few decades of its existence, Virginia passed very few laws regulating slavery. As the enslaved population grew, a stricter code controlling enslaved people was put in place. These are just two of many new laws passed starting in the 1640s and later. Modernized

spelling and capitalization have been used. The laws can be found on the web site “Virtual Jamestown,” available online at: [Virtual Jamestown](#)

Act XII, 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. [The usual practice was for a child’s status to be passed on by the father. This ensured that children of enslaved female African Americans would be enslaved for life, too.]

Part of Act XVI, April 1691

For prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may increase in this dominion, as well by negroes, mulattoes, and Indians intermarrying with English, or other white women, as by their unlawful accompanying with one another, be it enacted . . . that for the time to come, whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free shall intermarry with a negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman bond or free shall within three months after such marriage be banished and removed from this dominion forever,

Source 5 Morgan Godwyn, an Early Critic of the Bigotry of Slaveholders

Morgan Godwyn was an Anglican minister in Virginia and Barbados in the 1670s and 1680s. He wanted to convert Africans and Native Americans to Christianity. The opposition by slaveholders led him to criticize their bigoted attitudes toward Africans. In doing so, Godwyn was an early example of an emerging anti-racist mindset, even though he did not go all the way and condemn slavery itself. Excerpts from Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s & Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church: or, A Persuasive to the Instructing and Baptising of the Negroes and Indians in our Plantations* (London, 1680; Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2010). This version uses modernized spelling and capitalization. Available online from Religion in America site at: [The Negro’s and Indian’s Advocate, Suing for Their Admission Into the Church | Ashbrook RAHP \(religioninamerica.org\)](#)

Now [the opinion has formed] that the Negroes, though in their figure they carry some resemblances of manhood, yet are indeed no men. . . . [But] why should their owners, men of reason no doubt, conceive them fit to exercise the place of governors and overseers to their fellow slaves, which is frequently done, if they were but mere brutes? Since nothing beneath the capacity of a man might rationally be presumed proper for those duties and functions, wherein so much of understanding, and a more than ordinary apprehension is required. It would certainly be a pretty kind of comical frenzy, to employ cattle about business, and to constitute them lieutenants, overseers, and governors.

Source 6 A New York Slave Revolt, 1712

In the colonial period, New York City had a large population of enslaved Africans. They were not living on plantations in rural areas. They lived near each other and had some freedom to move around, meet with each other, and work with free laborers and indentured servants. On

April 6, 1712, a group of Africans and some indigenous Americans started a revolt. They burned buildings and shot, stabbed and killed several white colonists. Militia units put down the revolt and captured 27 Africans. Twenty-one were executed and the other six committed suicide. Robert Hunter, the governor of New York reported on the uprising in a letter to the Lords of Trade in London. The first passage here is from that report, in E. B. Callaghan, ed., *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*. Vol. 5, 1885. Note the way “color” shaped his understanding of who could and could not be enslaved. The second passage is from “Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, February 28, 1713, vol III, 28.” Both passages are in the same document at the “The Slave Rebellion” website, which can be accessed at: [New York Slave Revolt 1712 - SlaveRebellion.org \(archive.org\)](http://NewYorkSlaveRevolt1712-SlaveRebellion.org/archive.org)

I.

In this supreme court were likewise tried, one Husea belonging to Mrs. Wenham, and one John belonging Mr. Vantibourgh and convicted, these two are prisoners taken from a Spanish prize [a captured ship] this war and brought into this Port by a Privateer, about six or seven years ago and by reason of their color which is swarthy, they were said to be slaves and as such were sold, among many others of the same color and country, these two I have likewise reprieved till her Majesties pleasure be signified. Soon after my arrival in this government I received petitions from several of these Spanish Indians as they are called here, representing to me that they were free men subjects to the King of Spain, but sold here as slaves, I secretly pitied their condition but having no other evidence of [what] they asserted then their own words, I had it not in my power to relieve them, I am informed that in the West Indies where their laws against their slaves are most severe, that in case of a conspiracy in which any are engaged a few only are executed for an example. In this case 21 are executed, and six having done that Justice on themselves [committed suicide] more have suffered than we can find were active in this bloody affair which are reasons for my reprieving these, and if your Lordships think them of sufficient weight, I beg you will procure Her Majesty’s pleasure to be signified to me for their pardon, for they lye now in prison at their masters’ charge.

II.

From Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, February 28, 1713, vol III, 28. Order’s a law be prepared to prohibit Negro and Indian slaves above the Age of fourteen years from going in the Streets of this City after night without a lantern and a lighted candle therein under the penalty of Eight shillings to be disposed of to the Person or persons that shall Apprehend any such Negro or Indian slaves to be Recovered before the Mayor Recorder or any one of the Aldermen of this City who shall have full power to Commit such negro or Indian slave to Gaol until the Owner of such slave shall pay the said fine of Eight shillings.

Source 7 David Hume on Racial Differences

In the 1700s, the Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that sought to promote reason, science and such ideals as liberty, toleration, and constitutional government. Not all Enlightenment figures supported slavery or held racist ideas about Africans. However, many did, including Scottish philosopher David Hume. Hume expressed a new, supposedly more “scientific” racism based on inborn biological differences. This passage is from Hume’s 1748 “Essays: Moral, Political and Literary,” as quoted in Davis, David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 75.

“I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all other species of men, to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was any civilized nation of any other complexion than white. . . . No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no sciences. . . . Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men.”

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of seven source documents provided. Finally, read the two “Point of View” paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take part in a class discussion about slavery and racism in colonial America. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following question.

Essential Question: Did racism make American slavery worse than it otherwise would have been?

Point of View I: “Yes, it was racism that made slavery especially cruel and that may have kept it alive for a long time.”

Slavery has existed in many forms. However, enslaved people were not always dishonored as totally as Africans were in the Americas. Racism was the means for this dishonoring. It produced a withering contempt for the enslaved. This made it easy for the slaveholder to feel justified in exercising a complete tyranny over other human beings.

Such dishonoring took place in many systems of slavery, it is true. However, anti-African racism was uniquely powerful. It started with deeply held negative feelings about the color black. These feelings were supported by powerful folk prejudices and religious myths. Europe’s geographical separation from Africa was another key factor. This made Africans seem even more exotic and alien than they otherwise might have. Vast cultural and economic differences between Europeans and Africans added to that sense of difference. The color line made it easy to identify and control enslaved Africans. It kept them in place generation after generation. Slavery then prevented most enslaved Africans from thriving and developing their talents, and this only seemed to prove that they were inferior. In this way, racism sustained the entire slave system and kept it alive for so long.

Point of View II: “No, American slavery was bad and it got worse over time, but racism had little to do with that.”

Enslaved African Americans were easy to identify and keep under control in the United States. However, the idea of racial inferiority developed slowly as a justification for this system of slavery. The system grew harsher over time. But not because of racism. It did so because the economic uses of the slave system demanded ever more oppressive control over enslaved labor.

Slavery in America took many forms. At first, the few enslaved laborers available worked alongside other kinds of laborers. Many of those other laborers were also not fully free. White indentured servants were bound to one owner for a period of years, usually four to seven. Convicts were sent to the colonies under similar limits. Free and unfree often worked together on small family farms. Enslaved people in more urban settings also intermingled with other workers. They were enslaved, and racism did add to the burdens of their enslavement. However, over time what made slavery much worse was the growing domination of large-scale plantation agriculture. The intense labor needed forced planters to impose ever greater control over all aspects of enslaved people's lives. The slave codes passed by Virginia and other colonies singled out African Americans and controlled all aspects of their lives. Yes, this fueled racism and a growing racial divide. But it was the commercial pressure for more efficient plantation production, not racism, that drove this process.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about racism and slavery in colonial America.

1. Of the seven sources provided, list two that best support "Point of View I."
2. Why did you choose those two sources?
3. Of the seven sources provided, list two that best support "Point of View II."
4. Why did you choose those two sources?
5. Which of the two points of view do you agree with most? Why?

Homework Assignment: After briefly discussing answers to question #5 in class ask students to think through what they have learned from the lesson and the discussion. For homework, ask each student to write a paragraph stating his or her views more completely. Post some or all of these statements and ask students to read and think about them as a way to conclude this lesson.

Extension Activity 1:

Race and Slavery: A Document Based Question (DBQ) Essay

Did racism make American slavery worse than it otherwise would have been?

Instructions:

1. Read the background essay for this assignment. Then read through the seven primary sources for the lesson. Note the date, the nature of the source, its purpose, the point of view of the author and other relevant details.
2. Write a thesis statement. This is a brief (one or two sentences) answer to the question for the assignment.
3. Write an opening paragraph providing relevant historical context (use the lesson's background essay for this). End this paragraph with your thesis statement.
4. In two or three paragraphs, present a logical argument supporting your thesis statement. Back up your points by referring specifically to as many of the sources as you think are needed to make your case. Do not merely list the sources, use them in meaningful ways to support your thesis.
5. Write a concluding paragraph restating the thesis and any further thoughts you have as to its broader historical significance.

Extension Activity 2:

Slavery and Rebellion in New York City.

Source 6 for this lesson consists of two short passages on the slave uprising in New York in 1712. These passages are from a longer set of documents on “The Slave Rebellion” website, which can be accessed at: [New York Slave Revolt 1712 - SlaveRebellion.org \(archive.org\)](http://NewYorkSlaveRevolt1712-SlaveRebellion.org/archive.org)

Recommended Activity: Form several small groups and ask them to read and discuss the complete set of documents on “The Slave Rebellion” website. Have each group research online or in the library to find one other source of information on the New York slave revolt of 1712. Ask each group to prepare a brief presentation based on this extra reading. In it, they should explain what else they think was important about the rebellion. Have each group also identify the other source they found on the rebellion and explain why they think it is a valuable and dependable source.



Lesson Title: The Declaration of Independence and the Problem of Slavery

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.1, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Era: Revolutionary

Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of the Declaration of Independence and its relationship to the problem of slavery.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the five sources for the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting “Point of View” paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

The Declaration and Slavery: Background Essay

In 1776, thirteen British colonies along the coast of North America reached a breaking point. Attempts to settle matters had failed. It was time to end all political ties to Great Britain. The colonies decided that no longer would the British King or Parliament govern them or set rules for them in any way. In that year, colonial leaders gathered for the second time in a Continental Congress. There, they gave birth to a new nation, the United States of America. They still had to fight a long revolutionary war to win their independence. But on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. A group of five delegates helped write it. The Declaration’s main writer was Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson and the other leaders of this revolution felt a need to do more than merely announce their decision and assert their independence. They also wanted to explain why they were acting as they were. The Declaration was their explanation. The colonists had many complaints to make about British treatment of its colonies. Most of the Declaration was a list of those complaints. By itself that list only sums up an argument between two lands and two groups of people. By itself it might not have meant much to anyone else.

Something else made the Declaration far more important – to the colonists and the British, but also to the entire world. That “something else” was this passage from the second paragraph of the Declaration’s introductory remarks.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.

These stirring words make a universal claim. That is, they claim a truth for all of humanity, not just for themselves as British subjects. What's interesting is that the colonists did not need to do this. They did not need to make such a universal statement in breaking with Great Britain. They could have merely described what the British had done wrong. That is, they could have limited themselves to that list of the ways the British had violated their rights as British subjects. Instead, they began the Declaration by describing a universal principle of equality and liberty. The statement was dramatic and far-reaching. It has echoed around the world ever since. It is usually all that people really know about the Declaration.

Did the colonial rebels mean it? Were they determined to create a society based on these universal principles? After all, many people in the colonies were not actually enjoying this equality and liberty. Women, indentured servants, Native Americans and others did not enjoy equal civil and political rights. And of course, the most glaring form of inequality was slavery. One fifth of Americans were Africans brought as slaves to America against their will. The form of chattel slavery imposed on Africans in the colonies and throughout the Americas was cruel in the extreme. Their fate was to labor for slaveholders and obey their every command, usually for life. It is true slaveholders could and did sometimes free some of them. However, enslaved people had no legal recourse to demand such freedom. And those who were freed still faced many unfair limits on the kind of life they could enjoy.

Did the nation's founders not see this? Did they not see that slavery undercut and denied the noble principles of equality and liberty? In fact, they did see this. Many of the founders were in fact themselves slaveholders, including Jefferson. Some of them defended slavery. However, many of them, including Jefferson, did not defend it. Some of them expressed in no uncertain terms their sense of horror and shame about the practice.

Were they serious about this? To some degree, Jefferson seems to have been. In his original rough draft of the Declaration, he included slavery as one of the grievances against King George III. Jefferson's paragraph sharply contrasted slavery with the ideals of equality and liberty expressed in the Declaration. He clearly understood the way these things clashed. So also did many other delegates. However, the biggest change the Continental Congress made to Jefferson's draft was to remove his long paragraph against slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Why did the delegates remove the passage? Why did they miss the chance to condemn a practice that totally violated the ideals they chose to fight for? Judging past actions is often easy. Understanding why people in the past acted as they did is much harder. It is hard in this case first of all because the delegates left no record of their discussions of Jefferson's slavery passage. We don't know what they said when they took it out. It is hard because many of the

nation’s founders, like Jefferson, were slaveholders yet condemned slavery in forceful ways. Were they simply fooling themselves when they did this? Were they secretly in favor of slavery? Did they not care because they weren’t the ones suffering from the practice? Or did they have other competing interests in or reasons for avoiding the issue and for removing a passage about it from the Declaration of Independence?

The materials included in this lesson will help you better understand this difficult question. They invite you to think about, discuss and debate the relationship between the American Founding’s ideals and the horrors of the enslavement of African men, women and children.

Sources for this Lesson:

Source 1. The final version of the Declaration of Independence.

[Declaration of Independence - July 4, 1776 | Teaching American History](#)

Source 2. Thomas Jefferson’s original rough draft of the Declaration.

[Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence - Teaching American History](#)

Source 3. Prince Hall, [Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature](#) (1777)

Source 4. A passage from Jefferson’s “Notes of Proceedings in the Continental Congress.” In this passage, he expresses his views as to why his slavery passage was not included in the Declaration.

[Extract from Thomas Jefferson’s Notes of Proceedings in the Continental Congress, 2 July 1776 \[Quote\] | Jefferson Quotes & Family Letters \(monticello.org\)](#)

Source 5. A set of four comments about slavery by some of the founders attending the Constitutional Convention of 1787. This Convention took place several years after the Revolution, but those who attended it were part of the same founding generation that helped establish the United States.

Four Leaders During the Revolutionary Era Comment on Slavery

All quotes are from James Madison's *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. Available for the dates indicated after each quotation at:
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.as

1. "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man." James Madison, delegate from Virginia, in the Constitutional Convention, June 6, 1787.

2. "Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of heaven on a Country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes & effects providence punishes national sins, by national calamities." -- George Mason, delegate from Virginia, in the Constitutional Convention, August 22, 1787.

3. "If slavery be wrong, it is justified by the example of all the world. . . . In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves." – Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, delegate from South Carolina, in the Constitutional Convention, August 22, 1787.

4. "Let us not intermeddle. As population increases poor laborers will be so plenty as to render slaves useless. Slavery in time will not be a speck in our Country. Provision is already made in Connecticut for abolishing it. And the abolition has already taken place in Massachusetts. As to the danger of insurrections from foreign influence, that will become a motive to kind treatment of the slaves." Oliver Ellsworth, delegate from Connecticut, in the Constitutional Convention, August 22, 1787.

Student Worksheet Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of five source documents provided. Finally, read the two "Point of View" paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers as notes for a class discussion about Jefferson's slavery paragraph and the decision to take it out of the Declaration.

Point of View I: "They Were Hypocrites Who Did Not Care"

The founders acted to protect their own interests. That meant protecting slavery, too. Yes, many of them saw how evil slavery was. Their own “enlightened” views told them that. They did believe that every individual was entitled to liberty and equality before the law. But slavery was already built into the economy and society. The Southern colonies depended on enslaved labor entirely. Other colonies had enslaved populations. Many of them traded the goods that enslaved people produced and also took part in the transatlantic slave trade. Economic interests led the founders to put aside their qualms. Also, many of them saw Africans as inferior. They may have opposed slavery and talked about equality. But few of them believed Africans really could be equal. As to Jefferson’s proposed paragraph, they may have laughed about it. Jefferson blamed slavery on the British. Yet everyone knew the colonists themselves had fully supported slavery and mostly still did. The high ideals of the Declaration sounded nice. But Americans were perfectly happy to set them aside. They would do so for a long time yet to come.

Point of View II: “They Did What They Could”

To fight the British, the biggest problem facing the colonists was disunity. They were after all 13 separate colonies. They had often bickered. They had rarely cooperated on much. Now they declared their independence. But they still saw themselves as individual states. Barely cooperating, they faced off against the mightiest empire on earth. Could they unite enough to win? Taking a stand against slavery might well have kept that from happening. South Carolina and Georgia especially depended on enslaved labor almost entirely. Had they refused to fight, the revolution might well have failed. Slavery in the South especially would have remained as strong as ever. Slavery had existed in many other societies for most of human history. That had only barely begun to change in the Enlightenment era of the 1700s. Anti-slavery ideas were just starting to take organized form. The Declaration’s ideals alone actually gave this early anti-slavery thinking a big boost. The founders could not go further in that direction themselves. But they did what they could. In the long run it was a lot.

Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about Jefferson’s proposed paragraph about slavery.

1. Which of the two “Point of View” statements do you agree with most? Why?

2. What do you think is the weakest part of the argument supporting this Point of View? Why?

3. Which of the two “Point of View” statements do you agree with least? Why?

4. What do you think is the strongest part of the argument supporting that Point of View? Why?

Extension Activities:

1. Show this [video](#) entitled “Declaration Descendants” and ask students the following question: Is your general response to this video positive or negative? Can you explain why?
2. Ask students to write down two column headings: (1) Honesty and (2) Optimism. Explain that “Honesty” refers to true but painful facts about American history and traditional American heroes, and “Optimism” refers to reasons for hope that American history can represent progress towards aspirational ideals. Then give students 5-10 minutes to write down as much as they can under both columns from their readings and discussion in this lesson. Then spend 10 minutes discussing the students’ lists as a class.



FOUNDATION
AGAINST
INTOLERANCE
& RACISM

Lesson Title: Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Revolutionary America

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.2, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History; We Hold These Truths

Era: Revolutionary

Areas of Focus: Abolition, African American Experience, United States Founding

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of how the American Revolution influenced slavery and attitudes about slavery in America.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the six sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Slavery and Antislavery in Revolutionary America

Between 1775 and 1783, thirteen British colonies in North America fought a war for their independence. As a result, they formed a new nation, the United States of America. It seemed to many that, as one ballad put it, “the world turned upside down.”

Some Americans look back on the American Revolution as a shining moment without flaws. They see in it a glorious victory for liberty and equality. They point to the words of the Declaration of Independence, “that all men are created equal.” They tell stories of heroic clashes – the Battle of Lexington and Concord; Washington crossing the Delaware; the suffering soldiers at Valley Forge; the final victory at Yorktown. They believe that the high ideals of the Revolution won out completely then and for all time.

Others view the Revolution in a far harsher way. They see it as a dishonest time during which great injustices were ignored. Above all, they condemn the Revolution’s leaders for paying lip service to the ideal of liberty even while holding human beings as slaves. Most of those enslaved were Africans whose darker skin made them easy to identify and control. Skin color and cultural differences also made Africans and their American-born children easy targets for racist contempt. According to this harsher view, the Revolution did nothing to overcome these terrible failings. It may have made them worse.

Both of these views share something in common. They both find it easy to pass sweeping moral judgements about the past. Clearly, slavery was evil. It is easy to see that now. However, it was a much more commonly accepted practice in past societies. Moreover, those who did think it evil could not see an easy way to end or limit it. The past is complicated and hard to understand. And our judgments should be based on understanding. Most historians will tell us we should be cautious about passing judgment too quickly.

As to slavery at the time of the Revolution, it surely did clash with the lofty values of the Declaration. In fact, slavery in America in the early decades of the 1700s was only getting worse. As large-scale plantation agriculture grew, so did the numbers of enslaved people put to work growing rice, tobacco, cotton and other staples. The work imposed on enslaved laborers grew longer, harsher, more disciplined. As the numbers of the enslaved rose, so also did concerns about how best to control them. Fears about slave uprisings grew. Laws in some colonies sought to limit what little freedom enslaved people had earlier enjoyed. Fewer were freed by their slaveholders. Racist disdain and contempt were directed also against freed people of color. New laws limited their ability to form families, control property, do various kinds of work or take part in political life.

Once fighting with the British broke out, a few British military commanders offered freedom to enslaved African Americans who would join British forces. Several thousand did just that. However, Great Britain was itself a major player in the Atlantic

slave trading system. It controlled many slave-holding islands in the Caribbean. It feared the effect on its own enslaved populations were it to provoke slave uprisings in the rebellious colonies. All too often enslaved people freed by the British were left to fend for themselves after the war. The British even sold many of them back into slavery in the Caribbean.

Other enslaved African Americans joined the American rebels. Many responded to promises by some town or state military units of freedom for enslaved people who would fight. Moreover, enslaved African Americans knew that talk of freedom was in the air before and during the Revolution. Enlightenment ideas about reason, individual liberty, equality, and representative government were shaping the thinking of the colonists. In addition, there had been an upsurge of a new spirit of religious revivalism. This promised divine grace for everyone. Its stress was more firmly on the free will of each individual. African Americans, both enslaved and free, were intensely aware of all this. A number of them spoke out in pamphlets and petitions calling attention to the contradiction between the colonists' rhetoric and the reality of slavery.

Many colonists, including many of the Revolution's leaders, recognized this contradiction as well. In both America and Great Britain, the first stages of a movement to abolish slavery had begun. It started with a few Quakers and other evangelical Christians. No such organized effort to abolish slavery had existed in the world before the 1700s. America's first abolitionist society was formed in Pennsylvania in 1775.

But anti-slavery sentiment showed up in more ways than in these small abolitionist beginnings. In the North, most of the newly formed states began to take steps to end slavery. Vermont partially banned it in 1777. In Massachusetts, a new constitution became the basis for a judicial decision banning slavery outright in 1783. Pennsylvania adopted "gradual emancipation" in 1780. Most Northern states soon did the same – New York and New Jersey lagging until 1799 and 1804 respectively. Meanwhile, in 1787, the U.S. Continental Congress, banned slavery in the Northwest Territory. That was the territory north of the Ohio River that would one day form the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin. Earlier, in 1784, Congress came within one vote of banning slavery entirely from all U.S. territories west of the Appalachians.

Among the Revolution's leaders, expressions of regret about slavery were common. This was true even among many slaveholders. They recognized the painful contradiction; they did not hide from it or deny it. Of course, the two key slave states of South Carolina and Georgia forcefully resisted all this, as did many in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and elsewhere. Slavery persisted and even deepened throughout the revolutionary era. In fact, it soon started spreading to the Southwest. And yet, anti-slavery sentiment was already building in the North and in Congress. It was a sentiment that one day would put an end to the American slave system.

So, did the American Revolution shamefully ignore slavery? Or did it put slavery, as some have said, "on the road to extinction"? The materials for this lesson will help you think about, discuss, and debate this question.

Sources for this Lesson

Source 1 A Virginia Governor on Depriving People Freed from Slavery of Their Rights

In 1735, the British Board of Trade questioned a 1723 Virginia law that denied free Blacks the right to vote. Virginia's governor William Gooch replied to the letter the Board of Trade had sent. This passage is from that reply. Governor Gooch's reply can be found in Emory G. Evans, "A Question of Complexion: Documents concerning the Negro and the Franchise in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 71:4 (Oct. 1963), 412. It is available online from the website "Encyclopedia Virginia" at: <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/denying-free-blacks-the-right-to-vote-1724-1735/>

I lately had the favor of yours of the 18th of December last, signifying the pleasure of my Lords Commissioners for Trade, that I should inform them of the reasons which induced the Assembly to pass the Law in 1723 Chapter 4th depriving free Negroes & Mulattos of the privilege of voting at any election of Burgesses to serve in the General Assembly, or at any other elections.

In answer thereto it is to be noted, as I am well informed, that just the meeting of that Assembly, there had been a conspiracy discovered amongst the Negroes to cut off the English, wherein the free-Negroes & Mulattos were much suspected to have been concerned, (which will forever be the case) and tho' there could be no legal proof, so as to convict them, yet such was the insolence of the free-Negroes at that time, that the next Assembly thought it necessary, not only to make the meetings of slaves very penal, but to fix a perpetual brand upon free-Negroes & Mulattos by excluding them from that great privilege of a freeman, well knowing they always did, and ever will, adhere to and favor the slaves. And 'tis likewise said to have been done with design, which I must think a good one, to make the free-Negroes sensible that a distinction ought to be made between their offspring and the descendants of an Englishman, with whom they never were to be accounted equal.

Source 2. Arthur Lee, A Slaveholder, Opposes Slavery

Arthur Lee (1740–1792) was a member of one of the wealthiest plantation families in Virginia. He supported the American Revolution, serving as a diplomat and a member of the Continental Congress. He was a slaveholder himself. Yet he came to oppose slavery on moral and Christian grounds. This passage is from a 1767 letter he sent to the printer of the *Virginia Gazette*. His letter was intended to be seen by members of Virginia's Assembly. The letter is reproduced in full in James G. Basker, editor, *American Antislavery Writings: Colonial Beginnings to Emancipation*. Library of America, 2012. Kindle Edition.

Long and serious reflection upon the nature & consequences of slavery, has convinced me, that it is a violation both of justice and religion; that it is dangerous to the safety of the community in which it prevails; that it is destructive to the growth of arts &

sciences; and lastly, that it produces a numerous & very fatal train of vices, both in the slave, and in his master. . . .

Now, as freedom is unquestionably the birth-right of all mankind, of Africans as well as Europeans, to keep the former in a state of slavery is a constant violation of that right, and therefore of justice. . . .

There cannot be in nature, there is not in all history, an instance in which every right of men is more flagrantly violated. . . . Reader—remember that the corner stone of your religion is to do unto others as you would they should do unto you; ask then your own heart, whether it would not abhor anyone, as the most outrageous violator of this & every other principle of right, justice & humanity, who should make a slave of you and your Posterity forever. Remember that God knoweth the heart. Lay not this flattering unction to your Soul, that it is the custom of the country, that you found it so, that not your will, but your necessity consents; Ah think, how little such an excuse will avail you in that awful day, when your Savior shall pronounce judgment upon you for breaking a law too plain to be misunderstood, too sacred to be violated.

Source 3. Benjamin Rush on Slavery

Physician Benjamin Rush was one of those who signed the Declaration of Independence. He began to oppose slavery in the years leading up to the Revolution. He believed blacks had the same natural intelligence as whites and only needed education and freedom to thrive. The passage here is from a letter he wrote to a French correspondent in 1769. *Rush to Jacques Barbeu Dubourg, in Ephémérides du citoyen 9 (1769): 172–74*, as quoted in David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 145.

“It would be useless for us to denounce the servitude to which the Parliament of Great Britain wishes to reduce us, while we continue to keep our fellow creatures in slavery just because their color is different from ours.”

Source 4. A Petition from an Enslaved Person

Enslaved and free Black Americans sent several petitions to colonial leaders in revolt against the British. These passages are part of a petition signed by four enslaved people and submitted “In behalf of our fellow slaves of this province, and by order of their Committee” to the Massachusetts General Assembly, April 20, 1773. The petition was signed by Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie. It is available online from the Library of Congress at:

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.03701600/?st=text>

The efforts made by the legislative of this province in their last sessions to free themselves from slavery, gave us, who are in that deplorable state, a high degree of satisfaction. We expect great things from men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their fellow-men to enslave them. We cannot but wish and hope Sir, that you will have the same grand object, we mean civil and religious liberty, in

view in your next session. The divine spirit of freedom, seems to fire every humane breast on this continent. . .

WE are very sensible that it would be highly detrimental to our present masters, if we were allowed to demand all that of right belongs to us for past services; this we disclaim. . . We do not pretend to dictate to you Sir, or to the honorable Assembly, of which you are a member: We acknowledge our obligations to you for what you have already done, but as the people of this province seem to be actuated by the principles of equity and justice, we cannot but expect your house will again take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that ample relief which, as men, we have a natural right to.

BUT since the wise and righteous governor of the universe, has permitted our fellow men to make us slaves, we bow in submission to him, and determine to behave in such a manner, as that we may have reason to expect the divine approbation of, and assistance in, our peaceable and lawful attempts to gain our freedom.

WE are willing to submit to such regulations and laws, as may be made relative to us, until we leave the province, which we determine to do as soon as we can from our joint labors procure money to transport ourselves to some part of the coast of Africa, where we propose a settlement.

SOURCE 5. Hamilton on Arming Enslaved People

At first, General George Washington and other leaders opposed using enslaved people as soldiers. However, many Northern towns and some states soon included Blacks in local units. In 1779, Henry Laurens of South Carolina proposed freeing and arming 3000 formerly enslaved people as soldiers. Alexander Hamilton favored this idea, and so did the Continental Congress. But state leaders in the Southern colonies kept it from happening. Alexander Hamilton wrote about the idea to John Jay. These passages are from that letter, dated March 14, 1779, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, New York and London, 1961, vol. 2, pp. 17–19. Available online from Founders Online at: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0051>

“Dear Sir,

Col Laurens, who will have the honor of delivering you this letter, is on his way to South Carolina, on a project, which I think, in the present situation of affairs there, is a very good one and deserves every kind of support and encouragement. This is to raise two three or four battalions of negroes; with the assistance of the government of that state, by contributions from the owners in proportion to the number they possess. If you should think proper to enter upon the subject with him, he will give you a detail of his plan. He wishes to have it recommended by Congress to the state; and, as an inducement, that they would engage to take those battalions into Continental pay. . .

I foresee that this project will have to combat much opposition from prejudice and self-interest. The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks, makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience; and an unwillingness to part with

property of so valuable a kind will furnish a thousand arguments to show the impracticability or pernicious tendency of a scheme which requires such a sacrifice. But it should be considered, that if we do not make use of them in this way, the enemy probably will; and that the best way to counteract the temptations they will hold out will be to offer them ourselves. An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and I believe will have a good influence upon those who remain, by opening a door to their emancipation. This circumstance, I confess, has no small weight in inducing me to wish the success of the project; for the dictates of humanity and true policy equally interest me in favor of this unfortunate class of men.

Source 6. Jefferson's Proposal of 1784

In 1787, the newly independent U.S. Congress banned slavery from the Northwest Territory out of which would be formed the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. Even earlier, in 1784, Thomas Jefferson drafted a bill that would have excluded slavery from all the U.S. territory west of the Appalachian range. This might have prevented the South from expanding slavery as it later did into Alabama, Mississippi and Kentucky. However, by one vote Congress removed the provision excluding slavery from Jefferson's proposed ordinance. The first passage below is from Jefferson's proposal with its anti-slavery provision. It can be accessed from the website "Envisioning the West" at:

http://jeffersonswest.unl.edu/archive/view_doc.php?id=jef.00155

The second passage is from a letter Jefferson wrote to James Madison, April 25, 1784, explaining how that anti-slavery provision failed by one vote. The letter can be accessed from "Founders Online" at: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0009>

Provisions of Jefferson's Proposed Ordinance of 1784

1. [That states newly formed out of the Western territories] shall forever remain a part of the United States of America. 2. That in their persons, property and territory they shall be subject to the government of the United States in Congress assembled, and to the Articles of Confederation in all those cases in which the original States shall be so subject. 3. That they shall be subject to pay a part of the federal debts contracted or to be contracted to be apportioned on them by Congress according to the same common rule and measure, by which apportionments thereof shall be made on the other States. 4. That their respective governments shall be in republican forms, and shall admit no person to be a citizen who holds any hereditary title. 5. That after the year 1800 of the Christian era, there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any of the said States, otherwise than in punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted to have been personally guilty.

Jefferson's Letter

The [Slavery clause, No. 5] was lost by an individual vote only. Ten states were present. The 4. Eastern states, N. York, [&] Pennsva. were for the clause. [Je]rsey would have been for it, but there were but two members, one of whom was sick in his chambers. South Carolina Maryland, & ! Virginia ! voted against it. N. Carolina was divided as would have been Virginia had not one of its delegates been sick in bed.

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of six primary source documents provided. Finally, read the two “Point of View” paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take part in a class discussion about slavery and anti-slavery during the American Revolution. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following question.

Essential Question: Did the American Revolution ultimately help put an end to slavery?

Point of View I: “No. Despite the nice-sounding words, the Revolution did little to weaken slavery and may even have strengthened it.

Slavery was in fact growing stronger and harsher in the decades before the American Revolution. Many key leaders of the Revolution were themselves slaveholders, especially those from Virginia. Some of them made nice-sounding statements of regret about slavery. Nevertheless, these leaders of the Revolution were hypocrites. Most of them did little or nothing to end slavery or even to free the people they held in slavery. Petitions from African Americans went unheeded. It is true that many of the Revolution’s leaders did want to end the slave trade. Partly that was because they feared uprisings by the growing numbers of the enslaved. In any case, enslaved people were reproducing rapidly. There were enough of them to keep the plantation owners supplied without importing more from Africa. The slaveholders did not need the slave trade all that much. It is true that several Northern states did end slavery. But they did so only very gradually in most cases. Some African Americans in the North remained enslaved well into the 1800s. Racist disdain for them did not end. It led Northern communities to discriminate against African Americans in many ways even after they were freed. Meanwhile, North and South grew ever further apart over slavery as a deeper divide set in. Only a massively destructive civil war would put an end to slavery in the new nation.

Point of View II: Yes. Although the Revolution did not abolish slavery, its ideas moved many to view slavery as the new republic’s evil flaw that must someday be removed.

Some people claim that those who wrote the Declaration of Independence never meant its ideals to apply to enslaved Africans. This is not true. Five men worked together in the committee that wrote the Declaration. One of them, Thomas Jefferson, proposed laws to prevent the expansion of slavery into the western territories. John Adams helped draft a constitution for Massachusetts that provided grounds for ending slavery in that state. Benjamin Franklin became president of Pennsylvania’s abolitionist society. Roger Sherman was personally opposed to slavery, though he was willing to compromise over it to keep the

colonies united. It is true the Revolution did not end slavery everywhere in the United States. Yet most Northern states soon did end it. The growing anti-slavery feeling in the North may well have strengthened support for slavery in the South. This sharp divide then led to bitter conflict over slavery for decades to come. Yet the Revolution set down the basic ideals that in the end made slavery intolerable to the nation. It was in that way a true turning point in American history and the history of the world.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about slavery and anti-slavery during the American Revolution.

1. Of the six sources provided, list one that best supports “Point of View I.”
2. Why did you choose that source?
3. Of the six sources provided, list one that best supports “Point of View II.”
4. Why did you choose that source?
5. For Homework: Write a paragraph stating which of the two points of view you agree with most and why. Make specific references to the two sources you chose here. As a class, share some of these paragraphs and discuss them.

Extension Activity:

Petitions from Enslaved and Free African Americans

Source 4 for this lesson is a petition submitted by four African Americans to the Massachusetts General Assembly in 1773. Here are web links to two collections of other petitions by enslaved and free African Americans from around this time in U.S. history. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text4/text4read.htm>
<https://www.masshist.org/endofslavery/index.php?id=55>

Recommended Activity: Form several small groups and ask each group to read and discuss one of the petitions from the above web links. Make sure the groups choose

different petitions. Encourage them to do more research into the petition they have chosen. Ask each group to prepare a brief presentation summarizing and explaining what they have found. As a part of the presentation, have them explain how the document or documents they have read help them to answer the Essential Question for this lesson.



FOUNDATION
AGAINST
INTOLERANCE
& RACISM

Lesson Title: Slavery and the Founders

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.2, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of how the nation's founders viewed the problem of slavery in America.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the six sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Slavery and the Founders

Americans often speak with admiration about the nation's "founders." Those founders were the men who led the American Revolution and formed a new government based on the Constitution of 1787. They led a fight in the name of powerful ideas about the freedom of the individual. They formed a republic based on the principle that all men are created equal. And yet, the society they founded did not live up to those great ideals. The most glaring flaw was slavery. By 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed, about a fifth of the new nation's population were African Americans owned by others as property and forced to labor for their owners for all of their lives.

What did the nation's founders think about slavery and the challenge it posed to their high ideals? Did they face up to it or just look away from it? Did they have ideas about how to deal with it? Did they pretend to object to it without really caring at all – that is, were they hypocrites? Or were they honestly unable to do more than they did about it? To try to answer these questions, this lesson looks at some of the thoughts expressed by five of the most important of these founders – Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams.

To understand the thinking of these five men, it helps to understand the context of their times. In particular, it helps to understand the way slavery was developing in Revolutionary America. It also helps to understand how ideas about slavery were changing.

As to slavery itself, it was not just one thing, all the same everywhere throughout the new nation. In the Lower South (South Carolina and Georgia) huge rice, indigo and cotton plantations spread during the 1700s. Enslaved people labored long hours under very harsh conditions. They had little time to tend their own gardens or learn much about the wider world beyond their plantations. As the population of enslaved people grew, the demand for slave labor grew as well. Yet plantation owners also feared slave rebellions as enslaved Africans became majorities in many plantation regions. Slaveholders exercised very tight control over the people they held in slavery. In this part of the South, political leaders rarely criticized slavery or agreed with calls to end it.

In the Upper South – Virginia and Maryland especially – a very different pattern of slavery was developing during the last quarter of the 18th century. Planters were shifting from tobacco to wheat farming. This meant less of the intense gang labor of the Lower Southern states. Many slaveholders rented out the labor of the people they held in slavery to mills, ship builders, foundries and other businesses. Enslaved people in the towns and cities often had more freedom of movement. Some could even work extra hours for money for themselves. A more assertive and independent-minded population of enslaved people appears to have been developing. Slaveholders often recognized this in the people they held in slavery. Some welcomed it, others feared it. Many who had enslaved more people than they needed began selling them to planters in the deep South. In 1782, Virginia made it easier for these planters to manumit (free) people they held in slavery. Many did so in the years ahead, some out of sympathy and others simply to be rid of less productive enslaved laborers. The population of freed African Americans soared in many of the cities in this region. This was the context of slavery facing three of the founders dealt with in this lesson – Jefferson, Washington and Madison.

In the Northern states – New Jersey, New York, and the New England states – yet another pattern existed during the revolutionary era. There, enslaved people were used on small farms and in many ways in the growing towns and cities. They worked as domestic servants, as dock workers and sailors, or as day laborers doing hard unpleasant work. A growing but still small number learned skills needed to be tailors, hatters, butchers, barbers, ship joiners, ropemakers, etc. By the 1780s, a large number of enslaved people had already won their freedom. In that decade, many Northern states began to abolish slavery through programs of gradual emancipation. Yet even for people freed from enslavement, life was not easy. Competition from white workers kept the numbers of skilled artisans among African Americans from growing rapidly. White resentment confined them and limited their life chances in other ways as well. Ben Franklin and John Adams confronted slavery and movements against slavery from within this Northern context.

As for ideas about slavery, talk of liberty and individual rights was in the air everywhere. In the 1700s, small groups of Quakers and other religious groups had begun to call slavery an evil at odds with Christian faith. The Great Awakening was a religious upheaval of the 1730s. At times, some of its preachers appealed to all believers across class, sect, and even racial lines. The founders were for the most part refined, educated men. Most were students of the European Enlightenment, a philosophical movement in support of science, reason and the natural rights of man. Many of them could see how glaringly slavery contradicted these beliefs. And so also could the enslaved and freed African Americans. The war with the British brought these contradictions into stark relief in many ways. One historian described the situation in the Upper South this way:

“The changes unleashed by the war – especially the creation of a new class of mobile slave artisans, wagoners and boatmen – allowed some slaves to seize upon the egalitarian ideology of the Revolution and press for their freedom. As in the North, slaves and their allies never ceased to advertise the stark contradiction between fighting for one’s own freedom while denying it to others.”

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 278.

Slavery was deeply embedded in the social and economic life of the new nation. Yet a powerful new set of ideas about liberty and equality was moving all Americans in making the break with their British rulers. This is the context within which and against which the founders had to wrestle with the terrible tragedy of human bondage. Did they contend with it honestly? This is the question for you to answer using the words of these founders as presented in the sources for this lesson.

Sources for this Lesson

(Some of the spelling and punctuation in these sources has been modernized.)

1. THOMAS JEFFERSON – From *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Jefferson was a major figure in Virginia’s politics. He was the main author of the Declaration of Independence and the third U.S. President from 1801 to 1809. A large plantation owner who held many people in slavery himself, he agonized over the institution of slavery. Yet he never freed the people he had held in slavery. This passage is from Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1782. Available online from the “Teaching American History” website at:

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/notes-on-the-state-of-virginia-query-xviii-manners/>

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave, he is learning to do what he sees others do. . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals un-depraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriae of the

other. For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labor for another: in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavors to the vanishing of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever. . . .The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

2. THOMAS JEFFERSON – From Jefferson’s Letter to Henri Gregoire

Jefferson saw clearly the horrors of slavery. However, he also doubted that enslaved Africans were the equals of whites in mental ability. This racial prejudice helps explain why he accepted slavery despite his views about its evils. Late in life Jefferson may have had some doubts about his own judgments on this matter. This passage is a part of a letter Jefferson sent to Henri Gregoire in Paris in 1809. Earlier, Gregoire had written to Jefferson, describing some major achievements by black people. Gregoire wanted to prove Jefferson wrong about blacks’ inferiority. Here Jefferson answers Gregoire on this issue. From *The Thomas Jefferson Papers* at the Library of Congress, available online at:

https://www.loc.gov/resource/mtj1.043_0836_0836/?st=text

Be assured that no person living wishes more sincerely than I do to see a complete refutation of the doubts I have myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted to [Negroes] by nature and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves. My doubts were the result of personal observation on the limited sphere of my own state, where the opportunities for the development of their genius were not favorable, and those of exercising it still less so. I expressed them therefore with great hesitation. B0ut whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others. On this subject they are gaining daily in the opinions of nations, and hopeful advances are making towards their reestablishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family. I pray you therefore to accept my thanks for the many instances you have enabled me to observe of respectable intelligence in that race of men, which cannot fail to have effect in hastening the day of their relief.

3. GEORGE WASHINGTON – From His Last Will & Testament

The nation’s first President, George Washington, was a slaveholder who for a long time hoped Americans could find a way to end slavery. He and his wife Martha together held more than 300 people in slavery. He did free those he had held in slavery himself, but only at his death. This passage from his last will and testament describes how he did this. The “Dower Negroes” he mentions were the enslaved people who were held as property by his wife as a part of her dowry. The will was written in 1799, six months before Washington died.

<https://www.ushistory.org/presidentshouse/history/will.php>

Upon the decease of my wife, it is my will and desire, that all the slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. To emancipate them during her life, would, though earnestly

wished by me, be attended with such insuperable difficulties on account of their intermixture by marriages with the Dower Negroes . . . it not being in my power, under the tenure by which the Dower Negroes are held, to manumit them [that is, free them]. And whereas among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my will and desire that all [the old and infirm] shall be comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live; and that those [infants] as have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty-five years. . . . The negroes thus bound, are (by their masters or mistresses), to be taught to read & write; and to be brought up to some useful occupation, agreeably to the Laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, providing for the support of orphan & other poor Children. And I do hereby expressly forbid the sale, or transportation out of the said Commonwealth of any slave I may die possessed of, under any pretense whatsoever. . . . And to my mulatto man, William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom. Or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so. In either case however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life . . . & this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.

4. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN – A Visit to a School for Black Children

Benjamin Franklin was another key figure in the Revolution and the framing of the Constitution. He opposed slavery, and late in life he served as president of America's first abolitionist society. But Franklin was moderate in expressing his anti-slavery views. After all, he had himself held people in slavery at times as workers in his printing shop or in other businesses. In some ways, however, Franklin went further than other critics of slavery. Many of those critics still viewed African Americans as inferior. By the early 1760s, Franklin had accepted that African Americans were the moral and intellectual equals of whites. His visits to a school for Black children in Philadelphia led him to this opinion. This passage is about his visit to this school. It is from a letter to Anglican clergyman John Waring, who was active in London in promoting education for Black children. "From Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, 17 December 1763," Founders Online, National Archives, available at: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-10-02-0214>.

Reverend and dear Sir,

I have visited the Negro School here in company with the Reverend Mr. Sturgeon and some others, and had the children thoroughly examined. They appeared all to have made considerable progress in reading for the time they had respectively been in the school, and most of them answered readily and well the questions of the catechism. They behaved very orderly, showed a proper respect and ready obedience to the Mistress, and seemed very attentive to, and a good deal affected by, a serious exhortation with which Mr. Sturgeon concluded our Visit. I was on the whole much pleased, and from what I then saw, have conceived a higher opinion of the natural capacities of the black race than I had ever before entertained. Their apprehension seems as quick, their memory as strong, and their docility in every respect equal to that of white children. You will wonder perhaps that I should ever doubt it, and I will not undertake to justify all my prejudices, nor to account for them.

5. JAMES MADISON – The Escape of Billey

James Madison was perhaps the single most important member of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Later, he became the nation's fourth President (1809-1817). Like Jefferson and Washington, Madison was a Virginia slaveholder. He rarely said much about slavery, but he did reveal his views somewhat in a letter to his father during the Revolutionary War about someone he held in slavery, named Billey, who had escaped. Later, Billey changed his name to William Gardner. He married, raised a family and worked as a shipping agent in Philadelphia. As a free man, he continued to handle business for Madison and others. This version of the letter, "James Madison to James Madison, Sr., 8 September 1783," is available online from the "Princeton & Slavery" website at:

<https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/james-madison#ref-10>

On a view of all circumstances, I have judged it most prudent not to force Billey back to Virginia even if it could be done; and have accordingly taken measures for his final separation from me. I am persuaded his mind is too thoroughly tainted to be a fit companion for fellow slaves in Virginia. The laws here do not admit of his being sold for more than 7 years. I do not expect to get near the worth of him; but cannot think of punishing him by transportation [this means, selling him out of state farther South] merely for coveting that liberty for which we have paid the price of so much blood, and have proclaimed so often to be the right, & worthy the pursuit, of every human being.

6. JOHN ADAMS – A Letter to Abolitionist George Churchman

John Adams, the nation's second President (1797-1801), was from Massachusetts. That state essentially abolished slavery in 1783. Adams had never approved of slavery, but he rarely spoke out against it. Near the end of his term as President, in 1801, he did express his views in a letter to a Quaker abolitionist. This passage is the main part of that letter. From "John Adams to George Churchman," 24 January 1801," *Founders Online*, National Archives. Available at: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-4766>

Although I have never sought popularity by any animated speeches or inflammatory publications against the slavery of the blacks, my opinion against it has always been known, and . . . I have always employed freemen both as domestics and laborers, and never in my life did I own a slave. The abolition of slavery must be gradual and accomplished with much caution and circumspection. Violent means and measures would produce greater violations of justice and humanity, than the continuance of the practice. Neither Mr. Mifflin nor yourselves, I presume would be willing to venture on exertions which would probably excite insurrections among the blacks to rise against their masters and imbue their hands in innocent blood.

There are many other evils in our country which are growing, (whereas the practice of slavery is fast diminishing) and threaten to bring punishment in our land, more immediately than the oppression of the blacks. That sacred regard to Truth . . . seems to be vanishing from among us. A general relaxation of education and government. . . . These are in my opinion more serious and threatening evils, than even the slavery of the blacks, hateful as that is.

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of six primary source documents provided. Finally, read the two "Point of View" paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take

part in a class discussion about slavery and the founders of the nation. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following question.

Essential Question: Did the nation’s founders deal with the problem of slavery honestly and as best they could?

Point of View I: “No. They knew slavery was evil, just as we do today. However, their prejudices kept them from doing anything to bring about its end.

Thomas Jefferson is the clearest example of this hypocrisy. Here was a man who could speak truthfully and with feeling about the horrors of slavery. Yet in his own life, he ignored its evils. Unlike Washington, he could not even free the people he held in slavery in his will. He had doubts that Black people were equals who could be given the liberty he favored for everyone else. Yet he lived with enslaved African Americans whose skills and abilities he knew well. It is hard to believe that his apparently long-term intimate relationship with the enslaved Sally Hemings couldn’t make the full humanity of enslaved people clear to him. Madison understood Billey’s desire for liberty. He continued to rely on the man’s services even after Billey had freed himself. Yet Madison was also glad to let Billey go free so that his boldness would not rub off on the other people he held in slavery. Franklin seems to have accepted the equality of the races. Yet only late in life did he support the abolition of slavery – and he never pressed the others in the Constitutional Convention itself to do anything about slavery. John Adams opposed slavery, but he insisted other issues were more important. How could anything else have seemed more important? (Like many other founders, Adams mistakenly believed slavery was fading away. It was not.) These men clearly knew slavery was wrong. They should have and could have done more to end it.

Point of View II: Yes. They spoke honestly and did what they could. Their words and deeds gave the nation a start on the road to a more perfect and more equal society.

The five founders quoted in this lesson knew that slavery was a great evil. Yet except for Franklin, these five did little to bring an end to it. Two things can be said in their defense. First, slavery was a deeply entrenched part of America’s economy. Ending it would have imposed wrenching changes. Slavery is now long gone, so it is easy to think that abolishing it would not have been hard. As the Civil War shows, this was not true. Americans alive today might think about how many products they buy produced in other lands by slave labor or near-slave labor. Objecting to this is easy. Doing much about it is far harder. The founders were caught in a system they did not create. The second thing to be said is that many founders did speak out against slavery. Perhaps the most hypocritical of them, Jefferson, nevertheless spoke out most forcefully. And he did so publicly – in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. These public expressions mattered. They helped change many minds. Aside from speaking out, these men created a political order that would increasingly be at odds with slavery. It was an order based on the principles of equality and liberty -- on freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of religion, etc. Next to this world-changing achievement, these men’s private failings or compromises should be seen as far less important matters.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about slavery and the nation’s founders.

1. Of the six sources provided, list one that best supports “Point of View I.”

2. Comment on some specific details from that source that help explain why you chose it.

3. Of the six sources provided, list one that best supports “Point of View II.”

4. Comment on some specific details from that source that help explain why you chose it.

5. For Homework: Write a paragraph explaining which of the two points of view you agree with most and why. Make specific references to at least three of the sources for this lesson. As a class share some of these paragraphs and discuss them.

Extension Activity:

Comparing Washington and Jefferson on Slavery

This activity is based on the first three of the six sources for this lesson. These are the passages from Jefferson and Washington. In completing the activity, student should be encouraged to research and read more about each of these men, their views about slavery and their dealings with the people they held in slavery.

Recommended Activity: After researching and reading more about Jefferson and Washington, ask students to write a brief essay in which they address the following specific questions:

1. What are some key facts about Jefferson that a historian needs to know to get the most out of the passages from Sources 1 and 2?
2. Chose the two or three sentences in these passages that best sum up Jefferson’s opinions about Blacks and about slavery as a system?
3. In your own words, try to list all of the key demands Washington (in Source 3) is making in his will on behalf of the people he held in slavery.
4. What one or two sentences in the will best help show what Washington really felt about the people he held in slavery himself, and about slavery in general?
5. What is suggested or implied in these sources about Virginia in the 1700s, or its system of slavery? What can you infer about the way enslaved people lived during this time? What do the sources suggest about the problems someone might face after being freed from enslavement in Virginia at this time?



FOUNDATION
AGAINST
INTOLERANCE
& RACISM

Lesson Title: The Constitution and the Future of American Slavery: Were the Compromises Justified?

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90-120 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.2, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of the Constitution's compromises over slavery and how the nation's founders argued for or against them.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the nine sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Slavery and the Constitution's Compromises

The 55 men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 had a great deal on their minds. The American Revolution was over. The revolutionary leaders had formed a new government under a set of rules called the Articles of Confederation. Many of those leaders soon decided that the Articles gave too little power to the national government. In Philadelphia, their goal was to form a new, stronger government. Stronger, but not too strong. These men agreed about much, but they also disagreed about much. They spent the summer arguing, insisting and compromising.

In September, they finished their work. The result was the U.S. Constitution. It is this Constitution that still sets the rules for the nation's government to this day.

One big issue the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia argued about was slavery. Slavery existed in all 13 colonies at the start of the Revolution. In fact, it had existed in the colonies and in much of the rest of the world for centuries. It was especially crucial to the plantation economies of the South. Several delegates from the South came to Philadelphia especially determined to make sure the new Constitution would protect slavery. They were fearful that it might not.

They had reason to be fearful. Something new and threatening to them had appeared. It was a growing sense that slavery was repugnant, immoral, and should end. In the 1700s, small groups of Quakers and other religious groups in America and Great Britain had begun to speak out against slavery. During the era of the American Revolution this spirit spread and became politically powerful for the first time. In the 1780s, most Northern states acted to end slavery. By 1787 when the Constitutional Convention met, all but two Northern states had abolished slavery outright or had passed gradual emancipation laws that would end it in a few decades time. New York and New Jersey, the two holdouts, would pass such laws in 1799 and 1804.

Given this new and growing clash between defenders of slavery and its opponents, it was unavoidable that the issue would divide and challenge the Constitutional Convention.

Above all, the delegates wanted all 13 states to agree to a new constitutional framework of government. Their overall goal was to preserve the independence of the individual states while also uniting them under a more powerful national government. They sought to make that government strong, but also limited in its powers. Each of its three main branches – legislative, executive, judicial – would have its own powers but also the ability to check or limit the powers of the other branches. This national government would also share power with the states, and it would protect the rights of individuals. Reaching agreement about such a complex federal system would have been a challenge no matter what. Slavery made the challenge much greater.

The delegates from South Carolina and Georgia were especially determined to make sure slavery was protected under the new Constitution. In Virginia, attitudes toward slavery were more mixed than in the Lower South. Some top leaders who themselves owned slaves nevertheless spoke passionately about its evils. Several Northern delegates were forcefully and openly opposed to slavery. Others agreed, but they feared that a strong stand against slavery would cause several Southern states to leave the union to form their own slave-based government. They believed they had to compromise over slavery in order to hold the union together. Many delegates, North and South, expected slavery to fade away on its own. They were wrong about this, but many held out hope that slavery's days were numbered.

And so, they compromised. How did they compromise?

There were several compromises, but this lesson looks at the three main ones. The most important was the "three-fifths compromise." The South wanted enslaved people counted as full persons for the sake of representation in Congress. It did not want them counted at all in deciding how much direct tax a state owed. Many Northern delegates opposed counting enslaved people at all for purposes of representation. After all, enslaved people were treated as property and were not citizens with rights. Counting them for representation would increase the South's power by giving it more members in the House of Representatives. The two sides

compromised. For every five enslaved people, only three would be counted for representation and taxation. Here is the wording of the three-fifths clause:

Art. I, sec. 2. Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other persons.

Notice that the word “slave” does not appear in this clause. Nor does it appear anywhere else in the Constitution. Instead, the word “person” is used. It was also used this way in another big compromise. This one had to do with the slave trade. Many delegates wanted the slave trade banned immediately. Most Southern delegates wanted no limits on it at all. The delegates compromised. They decided Congress had to wait to ban the slave trade until 1808. This allowed a horrible activity to continue. Yet it also ensured that Congress could soon end it. In fact, Congress did ban the slave trade on the first day it could in 1808. The clause established that Congress could act to limit or prohibit slavery in some ways, even if it could not alter slavery within any individual state.

Art. I, sec. 9. The migration or importation of such persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.

The third compromise had to do with aiding in the capture of people escaping from enslavement. Providing for this pleased the slaveholders.

Art. 4, sec. 2. No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.

However, again the language refers to “persons,” not “slaves.” Moreover, the “persons held to service” are not said to be held by any federal law – only by the laws of the state seeking the runaway. They also were not said to be “justly held” or “legally held,” which were phrases some Southern slaveholders had wanted.

Were these language details important? Some historians say they meant little and were just a way to hide how much the Constitution actually did to protect slavery. Others say the language was crucial. It showed that the federal government did not accept slavery, even though it had no authority to alter it in the states where it was legal. Above all, they say, what was crucial was the refusal to put into the Constitution the idea that enslaved humans were merely a form of property. This refusal may have kept open the possibility of regulating slavery more easily and perhaps ending it some day in the future.

How then can we judge the Constitution’s handling of the issue of slavery? To answer that question, we will look at the views of those in the Convention itself. But it will also help to see the views of those who fought against slavery later in U.S. history. The sources in this lesson will help you do both things. Together, all of the sources should help you answer the lesson's essential question.

Sources for this Lesson

(Some of the spelling and punctuation in these sources has been modernized.)

1. James Madison on “Property in Men”

Virginia's James Madison recorded the discussions in the Constitutional Convention. In these notes, he refers to himself in the third person. This passage is from his notes for August 25, 1787. The Convention was discussing whether or not to allow a tax or duty to be charged on the importation of enslaved people. In this passage, Madison was making a brief objection to imposing any such tax. In later decades, abolitionists would often cite this short passage and see it as highly significant. The passage is from *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*, reported by James Madison, edited by Gaillard Hund and James Brown Scott, published by Oxford University Press, 1920, available from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library. These passages are available online at: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_825.asp

Mr. MADISON thought it wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men. The reason of duties did not hold, as slaves are not like merchandize, consumed, &c

2. Gouverneur Morris of New York

Gouverneur Morris was a wealthy New Yorker who moved to Philadelphia in 1779. In 1787, he represented Pennsylvania in the Constitutional Convention. He spoke more often than any other delegate there. He was also one of the strongest and most open opponents of slavery at the Convention. In this passage, he opposes the proposal to allow slave states to count enslaved people for purposes of representation in Congress. The passage is from *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*, reported by James Madison, available online from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library at: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_808.asp

Mr. Govr. MORRIS. He never would concur in upholding domestic slavery. It was a nefarious institution. It was the curse of heaven on the states where it prevailed. Compare the free regions of the Middle States, where a rich and noble cultivation marks the prosperity and happiness of the people, with the misery and poverty which overspread the barren wastes of Virginia, Maryland and the other states having slaves. . . Upon what principle is it that the slaves shall be computed in the representation? Are they men? Then make them citizens and let them vote. Are they property? Why then is no other property included? The houses in this city [Philadelphia] are worth more than all the wretched slaves which cover the rice swamps of South Carolina. The admission of slaves into the representation when fairly explained comes to this: that the inhabitant of Georgia and South Carolina who goes to the coast of Africa, and in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tears away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections and damns them to the most cruel bondages, shall have more votes in a government instituted for protection of the rights of mankind, than the citizen of Pennsylvania or New Jersey who views with a laudable horror, so nefarious a practice.

3. Mason of Virginia Against the Slave Trade, August 22, 1787

Virginia delegate George Mason was a major slaveholder who opposed slavery forcefully. In the Constitutional Convention on August 22, 1787, he spoke in support of a proposed ban on the slave trade. In the end, Mason refused to sign the Constitution partly due to his feelings about slavery. And yet, he never freed the people he had held in slavery. This passage is from *The*

Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787, reported by James Madison, available online from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_822.asp

Col. MASON: This infernal traffic originated in the avarice of British Merchants. The British government constantly checked the attempts of Virginia to put a stop to it. . . . Maryland and Virginia, he said, had already prohibited the importation of slaves expressly. North Carolina had done the same in substance. All this would be in vain if South Carolina and Georgia were at liberty to import. The Western people are already calling out for slaves for their new lands, and will fill that Country with slaves if they can be got through South Carolina and Georgia. Slavery discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor when performed by slaves. They prevent the immigration of whites, who really enrich and strengthen a country. They produce the most pernicious effect on manners. Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of heaven on a country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects providence punishes national sins, by national calamities.

4. Ellsworth of Connecticut Responds to Mason, August 22, 1787

Oliver Ellsworth was a delegate from Connecticut. He replied to George Mason (see Source 3), who wanted a total ban on the slave trade. Ellsworth, like Mason, opposed slavery. However, he thought it was more important to keep North and South together by reaching acceptable compromises on slavery and the slave trade. He may also have felt Virginia slaveholders like Mason had selfish reasons for opposing the slave trade. He hints at those reasons in this passage. From *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*, reported by James Madison, available online from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library at: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_822.asp

Mr. ELSWORTH. As he had never owned a slave could not judge of the effects of slavery on character. He said however that if it was to be considered in a moral light we ought to go farther and free those already in the country. As slaves also multiply so fast in Virginia and Maryland that it is cheaper to raise than import them, whilst in the sickly rice swamps foreign supplies are necessary, if we go no farther than is urged, we shall be unjust towards South Carolina and Georgia. Let us not intermeddle. As population increases poor laborers will be so plenty as to render slaves useless. Slavery in time will not be a speck in our Country. Provision is already made in Connecticut for abolishing it. And the abolition has already taken place in Massachusetts. As to the danger of insurrections from foreign influence, that will become a motive to kind treatment of the slaves.

5. The Pinckneys of South Carolina, August 22, 1787

Also on August 22, 1787, directly following Ellsworth's remarks (see Source 4) two closely related South Carolina delegates spoke. Charles Pinckney and General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney were part of a large family of wealthy slaveholders. Both men were among the strongest defenders of slavery in the Constitutional Convention. In these passages, each of them in different ways spoke in favor of the slave trade. From *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*, reported by James Madison, available online from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library at: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_822.asp

Mr. PINCKNEY. If slavery be wrong, it is justified by the example of all the world. He cited the case of Greece Rome and other ancient states; the sanction given by France England, Holland

and other modern states. In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves. If the Southern states were let alone, they will probably of themselves stop importations. He would himself as a citizen of South Carolina vote for it. An attempt to take away the right as proposed will produce serious objections to the Constitution which he wished to see adopted.

General PINCKNEY declared it to be his firm opinion that if himself and all his colleagues were to sign the Constitution and use their personal influence, it would be of no avail towards obtaining the assent of their constituents. South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves. As to Virginia she will gain by stopping the importations. Her slaves will rise in value, and she has more than she wants. It would be unequal to require South Carolina and Georgia to confederate on such unequal terms. . . . He contended that the importation of slaves would be for the interest of the whole Union. The more slaves, the more produce to employ the carrying trade; the more consumption also, and the more of this, the more of revenue for the common treasury.

6. James Madison, Federalist No. 42.

Once the Constitution was written, it was sent to the states to debate and approve. *The Federalist Papers* were 85 essays written to support the Constitution. They were published in 1787-88 as the states were debating the document and deciding whether to ratify it. The essays were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. This passage is from one of the essays by Madison. It deals with the clause prohibiting Congress from banning the slave trade before 1808. The passage is from "Federalist No. 42" in *The Federalist Papers*, all of which are available online from "The Avalon Project" website of Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed42.asp

It were doubtless to be wished, that the power of prohibiting the importation of slaves had not been postponed until the year 1808, or rather that it had been suffered to have immediate operation. But it is not difficult to account, either for this restriction on the general government, or for the manner in which the whole clause is expressed. It ought to be considered as a great point gained in favor of humanity, that a period of twenty years may terminate forever, within these states, a traffic which has so long and so loudly upbraided the barbarism of modern policy; that within that period, it will receive a considerable discouragement from the federal government, and may be totally abolished, by a concurrence of the few states which continue the unnatural traffic, in the prohibitory example which has been given by so great a majority of the Union. Happy would it be for the unfortunate Africans if an equal prospect lay before them of being redeemed from the oppressions of their European brethren! Attempts have been made to pervert this clause into an objection against the Constitution, by representing it on one side as a criminal toleration of an illicit practice, and on another as calculated to prevent voluntary and beneficial emigrations from Europe to America. I mention these misconstructions, not with a view to give them an answer, for they deserve none, but as specimens of the manner and spirit in which some have thought fit to conduct their opposition to the proposed government.

7. Charles Rich of Vermont, February 1820

In 1819-20, a great conflict arose over the issue of expanding slavery into the vast Louisiana Purchase lands west of the Mississippi. A part of those lands had applied for admission as the slave state of Missouri. Many northern anti-slavery lawmakers wanted slavery banned from Missouri. Instead, a compromise was reached. Missouri was admitted as a slave state along with Maine as a free state; also, slavery was banned in the remaining Louisiana Purchase lands north of the 36°30' parallel, except for Missouri. During the debates, House member Charles Rich of

Vermont defended the Constitution against slaveholders who said it protected their property in enslaved people everywhere. Rich said the Constitution never approved of slavery and did nothing to prevent Congress from limiting it. His argument was not a new one. Anti-slavery advocates in future years would continue to make it. This passage is part of Rich's speech. From *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 16th Congress, 1st Session. Pages 1395 & 1396. <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=036/llac036.db&recNum=59>

It is true that, at the time the Declaration of Independence was adopted, as well as the Constitution, and from circumstances over which our fathers had no control, slavery, unfortunately, existed in our country. And the fact of its existence, though repugnant to the noble feelings, which alone gave birth to, and with the aid of Providence sustained the Revolution, and which matured and brought forth the Constitution of our country, is believed to have produced a necessity for its continued existence. But I ask gentlemen by what charter of a national character, a right to hold a human being in slavery has ever been recognized?

The fact that the word "slave" is nowhere to be found in the Constitution, or other words so employed as to convey an idea that the framers of that instrument intended to recognize slavery, has satisfied my mind that, as from a condition of things beyond their control, or that of their country, they could not prohibit it in the then "existing States." And as, for obvious reasons, they were obliged indirectly to admit the fact of its existence, they purposely, and very carefully, avoided the use of any expression from which, by fair construction, even an argument could be derived in favor of its legitimacy.

8. William Lloyd Garrison, 1832

William Lloyd Garrison became a central figure in the anti-slavery movement in the 1830s. He called for the immediate abolition of slavery. He saw slavery in religious terms as a sin staining the nation's honor. Garrison had a harsh view of the U.S. Constitution, which he considered a purely pro-slavery document. He expresses this view in "On the Constitution and the Union," which he wrote in his magazine *The Liberator*, December 29, 1832. It is available online from the website "TeachingAmericanHistory.org" at:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/on-the-constitution-and-the-union>

There is much declamation about the sacredness of the compact which was formed between the free and slave states, on the adoption of the Constitution. A sacred compact, forsooth! We pronounce it the most bloody and heaven-daring arrangement ever made by men for the continuance and protection of a system of the most atrocious villainy ever exhibited on earth. Yes—we recognize the compact, but with feelings of shame and indignation, and it will be held in everlasting infamy by the friends of justice and humanity throughout the world. It was a compact formed at the sacrifice of the bodies and souls of millions of our race, for the sake of achieving a political object – an unblushing and monstrous coalition to do evil that good might come. Such a compact was, in the nature of things and according to the law of God, null and void from the beginning. No body of men ever had the right to guarantee the holding of human beings in bondage. Who or what were the framers of our government, that they should dare confirm and authorize such high-handed villainy – such flagrant robbery of the inalienable rights of man – such a glaring violation of all the precepts and injunctions of the gospel – such a savage war upon a sixth part of our whole population? They were men, like ourselves – as fallible, as sinful, as weak, as ourselves. By the infamous bargain which they made between themselves, they virtually dethroned the Most-High God, and trampled beneath their feet their own solemn and heaven-attested Declaration, that all men are created equal, and endowed by

their Creator with certain inalienable rights – among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

9 Frederick Douglass, 1860

Frederick Douglass, who escaped enslavement as a young man, became perhaps the greatest African America abolitionist leader of his time. At first, he and William Lloyd Garrison agreed about most issues. In time, however, he rejected Garrison's views on several key matters. He disagreed with Garrison's feeling that the North should leave the hopelessly sinful Union. Douglass also argued against Garrison's negative view of the Constitution. He did that, for example, in a Fourth of July speech in 1852. He also did it in a speech he gave in 1860 in Glasgow, Scotland. This passage is from that speech, which can be accessed online from the website "TeachingAmericanHistory.org" at:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-constitution-of-the-united-states-is-it-pro-slavery-or-anti-slavery/#sthash.Skum6u9J.cQuSr5qX.dpuf>

My argument against the dissolution of the American Union is this: It would place the slave system more exclusively under the control of the slaveholding States, and withdraw it from the power in the Northern States which is opposed to slavery. Slavery is essentially barbarous in its character. It, above all things else, dreads the presence of an advanced civilization. It flourishes best where it meets no reproving frowns, and hears no condemning voices. While in the Union it will meet with both. Its hope of life, in the last resort, is to get out of the Union. I am, therefore, for drawing the bond of the Union more completely under the power of the Free States. What they most dread, I most desire. I have much confidence in the instincts of the slaveholders. They see that the Constitution will afford slavery no protection when it shall cease to be administered by slaveholders. They see, moreover, that if there is once a will in the people of America to abolish slavery, there is no word, no syllable in the Constitution to forbid that result. They see that the Constitution has not saved slavery in Rhode Island, in Connecticut, in New York, or Pennsylvania. . . . Within the Union we have a firm basis of opposition to slavery. It is opposed to all the great objects of the Constitution. . . . My position now is one of reform, not of revolution. I would act for the abolition of slavery through the Government — not over its ruins. If slaveholders have ruled the American Government for the last fifty years, let the anti-slavery men rule the nation for the next fifty years. If the South has made the Constitution bend to the purposes of slavery, let the North now make that instrument bend to the cause of freedom and justice.

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of nine primary source documents provided. Finally, read the two "Point of View" paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take part in a class discussion about slavery and the Constitution. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following essential question.

Essential Question: Were the Constitution's compromises over slavery justified?

Point of View I: "No." The delegates compromised too much. They unnecessarily helped protect slavery when they could have limited it or put an end to it.

The tragedy is that while they designed an excellent system of government, they gave way at every point to the demands of Southern slaveholders. Some Northern delegates spoke out against slavery forcefully. Others saw it as an evil, but one that was of less importance than keeping the states united. Some told themselves slavery would fade away on its own, even though it was clearly not doing that. In any case, most were willing to live with it. Nevertheless, slavery was too high a price to pay for the national unity they prized. Besides, slavery kept the nation from ever really uniting anyway. In the meantime, the slave states got everything they wanted. With the three-fifths clause, enslaved people were counted for representation in Congress. This made the South stronger in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College. By preventing any ban on the slave trade until 1808, the South could keep importing enslaved people and adding to its power in Congress. Finally, the fugitive slave clause meant slaveholders could recapture people who had escaped enslavement even in free states. Such people, the clause said, must be “delivered up.” This implied that enslaved people had to be regarded as property everywhere, not just in the slave states alone. Slaveholders would claim that this shows the federal government itself backed the idea that there could be property in men. In other words, the Constitution was truly a slaveholders’ compact. No wonder it would take a bloody civil war to end what the Constitution never could.

Point of View II: “Yes.” The Constitution never accepted slavery as a form of property. It created a government that enabled anti-slavery forces to grow and ultimately triumph.

The Constitution definitely did protect slavery. It could even be said to have strengthened slavery’s hold in the states where it was legal. This was surely true of the three-fifths clause and the clause providing for the recapture of people escaping enslavement. The slave trade clause also helped the South to continue adding slaves and increasing its representation in Congress. However, that clause gave Congress the right to ban the slave trade after 1808. This established the new federal government’s right to limit slavery, at least outside the states where it was legal. South Carolina and Georgia especially hoped for more. After all, they arrived at the Convention at a transforming time. Many Northern delegates came from states that were abolishing slavery. The South desperately wanted the Convention to accept the idea that, as Madison put it, there could be “property in men.” Instead, the Constitution went to great lengths to avoid even mentioning the word “slave.” Moreover, it never granted slavery the official, explicit backing of the federal government. As to the fugitive slave clause, many wording changes were made during debates. All the changes together made clear that the clause depicted slavery as solely the product of state laws. Because the Constitution kept its distance from the idea of property in men, it left intact the right of the federal government to stop slavery’s expansion into new territories. This was the issue that would build over the decades. It would ultimately bring on the Civil War and the end of slavery. This is why abolitionist Frederick Douglass was right when he called the Constitution a “glorious liberty document.” In the hands of the right leaders, that is in fact what it became.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about slavery and the Constitution.

1. Of the nine sources provided, list two that best support “Point of View I.”
2. Comment on some specific details from those sources that help explain why you chose them.

3. Of the nine sources provided, list two that best support “Point of View II.”
4. Comment on some specific details from those sources that help explain why you chose them.
5. For Homework: Write a brief dialogue between William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass (see Sources 8 and 9). In the dialogue, have these two abolitionist figures debate the essential question for this lesson. Be sure to have each man refer to specific portions of some of the sources for this lesson. As a class share some of these invented dialogues and discuss them.

Extension Activity:

Martin Luther King Jr. on the Declaration and the Constitution

At the height of the historic civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He gave the speech at the Lincoln Memorial as part of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington. In the speech, King made specific remarks about the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. King's speech is available in many places and can be found online from the website "American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond." It is available at: <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1951-/martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-august-28-1963.php>

Recommended Activity: Ask students to read King’s speech. Perhaps supply additional background information on the speech. Then ask students to write a brief essay in which they address the following specific questions:

1. What does King mean when he uses the phrase “a promissory note”?
2. What does he mean by his reference to “a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds"? What other details in his speech support his claim that Black Americans have been given “a bad check”?
3. Read over this lesson’s Sources 8 and 9. Include in your essay your view as to which of the two sources King would most likely have agreed with.
4. Share some of these essays or portions of them in a class discussion of this lesson’s essential question.