

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Lesson Title –The Slavery Question in Early America
From David Chassanoff

Grade – 8

Length of class period – 53 minutes (possibly with some homework to be completed)

Inquiry – Students will be investigating why the Founding Fathers kept slavery in the Constitution.

Objectives - Students will be interpreting Jefferson's slavery grievance in the Declaration to the debate when writing the Constitution. In addition, students will also be able to read some modern day historical interpretations and come up with their own view points.

Materials - Source A - Jefferson's Slavery Grievance.
Source B - Constitutional Convention Arguments.
Source C - Historian Interpretations.
Chart / Graphic Organizer recording where people stood on the slavery issues.

Activities -

1. Review Source A - Jefferson's Slavery Grievance.

Explain to students:

You have looked at the grievances in the Declaration of Independence. These were the colonists' complaints against the king.

There was a grievance about slavery that was deleted from the final version.

As a class, read aloud.

2. In groups, students read the grievance and answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

Discussion Questions:

- Who is Thomas Jefferson blaming for slavery? (*King*)
- Thomas Jefferson owned slaves. Do you believe that he really opposed slavery?
- Why might he have wanted to include the grievance in the Declaration of Independence? (*Explain that the grievance was deleted because southern states opposed it.*)

3. Review Source B - Constitutional Convention Arguments.

The slavery grievance didn't make it into the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but the document did claim that, "all men are created equal." Eleven years later, in 1787, the founders drafted the Constitution and they didn't eliminate slavery. This raises the question:

Why did the founding fathers keep slavery in the **Constitution if the Declaration of Independence claimed, "all men are created equal"?**

4. Hand out Source C - Historian Interpretations and the graphic organizer worksheet. Have students read the documents and fill in the chart.

5. Wrap Up (possibly for homework):

- Overall did these men realize that slavery was a problem?
- Who did think it was a problem and who didn't?
- For those who did think it was a problem, why didn't they do anything to abolish slavery?

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

This activity will be assessed as homework. We will start it in class and I will check for completion the next day. It will also be graded as a necessary assignment in their Social Studies notebook.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –
Standard 2

Students will be able to: 2.2 – Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including electronic media (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, images, artifacts, recordings and text).

Grade 8 – 2. Compare information about the same event using a variety of primary sources.

Grade 8 – 5. Evaluate the credibility of a speaker (e.g., hidden agendas, slants or biases).

Name: _____

	According to this person, was slavery a problem?	If no, why not? If yes, what was more important than ending slavery?
Mr. Rutledge		
Mr. Elseworth		
Mr. Williamson		
Ben Franklin		
Historian #1		
Historian #2		
Historian #3		
Historian #4		

Sources:

Declaration – rough draft. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/ruffdrft.html>

James Madison's notes http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp

Ben Franklin's notes <http://bartelby.net/268/8/11.html>

Jefferson's feelings on slavery

Freehling, http://www.joshualetter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=58

Burstein, <http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/interviews/Burstein.htm>

Claire Berkowitz and Karen Board Moran

<http://www.wwhp.org/Resources/Slavery/constitution.html>

Digital History

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=293

Source A - Slavery Grievance (Edited)

Thomas Jefferson was born to a slave-owning family and he himself owned slaves. As chairman of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote a paragraph condemning slavery in his first draft of the Declaration. He included this paragraph in his list of complaints against King George III. Before the final version of the Declaration was adopted, this paragraph was deleted.

Read the grievance below and answer the questions that follow:

King George III has waged cruel war against human Nature itself. He has taken away the most sacred rights of Life and Liberty from a distant people who never offended him. He did this by captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere if they did not die a miserable death in their transportation to this new world. These disgraceful practices are the Warfare of the *Christian* King of Great Britain.

He has stopped every attempt to prohibit or to restrain the disgusting business of slavery. He is determined to keep open a market where men are bought and sold.

Guiding Questions:

1. How does the Slavery Grievance describe slavery? Who does Jefferson blame for the continuation of the slave trade?

2. Why does Jefferson *italicize* the word 'Christian' at the end of the first paragraph?

3. Why do you think that Thomas Jefferson wrote a paragraph

Source B – Constitutional Convention (Edited)

Focus:

Why did the Constitution allow slavery to continue, if the Declaration of Independence claimed that “all men are created equal”?

Philadelphia Constitutional Convention of 1787

The Philadelphia Constitutional Convention was where the Founding Fathers gathered to write the Constitution. There were many debates, but ultimately what was the final decision? Were there contradictions?

Mr. RUTLIDGE: Religion and humanity have nothing to do with this question. The true question at present is whether the Southern states shall or shall not be a part of the Union. If the Northern states think about their interest, they will not oppose the increase of slaves because they will profit by selling the goods that slaves produce. I want any mention of restricting slavery out of the Constitution.

Mr. ELSEWORTH: Let every state do what it pleases. The morality or wisdom of slavery are decisions belonging to the states themselves. What enriches a part enriches the whole.

Mr. WILLIAMSON: Both in opinion and practice he was against slavery; but thought it more in favor of humanity, from a view of all circumstances, to let in South Carolina and Georgia on those terms, than to exclude them from the Union.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: I agree to this Constitution with all its faults—if they are such—because I think a general government necessary for us,... I doubt, too, whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution; for, when you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?

Source C – Historians

Historian Interpretation #1 (Edited)

While being discreet about his inner feelings, Jefferson believed that Africans were more savage and had a lower intelligence than whites. Jefferson suspected blacks were inferior rather than suspecting blacks were equal.

Source: William Freehling

http://www.joshualetter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=58

Historian Interpretation #2 (Excerpt)

Jefferson was a liberal who believed that the most humane thing that could be done with the slavery problem was to re-colonize African-Americans back in Africa. He was not alone in this. James Madison felt similarly.

Source: Andrew Burstein <http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/interviews/Burstein.htm>

Historian Interpretation #3 (Excerpt)

The framers of the Constitution believed that concessions on slavery were the price for the support of southern delegates for a strong central government. They were convinced that if the Constitution restricted the slave trade, South Carolina and Georgia would refuse to join the Union. But by sidestepping the slavery issue, the framers left the seeds for future conflict. After the convention approved the great compromise, Madison wrote: "It seems now to be pretty well understood that the real difference of interests lies not between the large and small but between the northern and southern states. The institution of slavery and its consequences form the line of discrimination."

Source: Digital History

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=293

Historian Interpretation #4 (Excerpt)

Abolitionists said the United States Constitution was a slave document created by slave owners. After 50 years of secrecy the deals made behind closed doors were exposed by James Madison's newly published Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787. Many of the founding fathers who owned slaves had varying opinions about whether slavery should be abolished. In order to stabilize the nation politically and economically, the first two compromises with human life occurred:

- The 3/5's Compromise enabled more masters to become lawmakers, even though the 3/5's of the slave population counted, had no vote or voice in the democracy.
- The Slave Trade Compromise stopped slave imports after 1807 encouraging slave breeding within the United States and slave auctions throughout the south.

Source: Claire Berkowitz and Karen Board Moran

<http://www.wwhp.org/Resources/Slavery/constitution.html>