



0. SLAVERY and the DECLARATION - Story Preface

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Lucy, a Monticello slave, was sold at Monticello the year after Thomas Jefferson died. She is depicted here, c.1845, by Daguerreotype. Image online via Library of Congress, Courtesy of Mason County Museum, Maysville, Kentucky.

Jefferson was a product of a slave-owning culture, and his personal struggles about the plight of African-Americans are evident throughout his writings and letters. Although he makes observations about perceived differences between races, he is clear that equal rights apply to all men.

A slave-owner himself, he wanted slavery - which he referred to as an American "disease" - to end:

Where the disease [of slavery] is most deeply seated, there it will be slowest in eradication. In the Northern States it was merely superficial and easily corrected. In the Southern, it is incorporated with the whole system and requires time, patience, and perseverance in the curative process. That it may finally be effected and its progress hastened, will be [my] last and fondest prayer. (Thomas Jefferson to David Barrow, 1815.)

In his original draft of the Declaration, Jefferson included a scathing indictment of the British slave-trade (which he called an "assemblage of horrors" authorized by the king) and its use in the American colonies. Cut from the final version were these (among other) words:

He [George III, the British king] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither . . . Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce.

In order for the Declaration to be signed by all thirteen colonies, however, Jefferson's comments about slavery in America were eliminated. The battle on that issue - which the drafter anticipated would occur - was left for another day.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SLAVERY-and-the-DECLARATION-Thomas-Jefferson>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SLAVERY-and-the-DECLARATION-Thomas-Jefferson>



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