

## Thomas Jefferson's Complex Relationship To Slavery, Deleted Portions of the Declaration of Independence

"In 1767 at age 24, Jefferson inherited 5,000 acres of land along with 52 slaves by his father's will. In 1768, Jefferson began construction of his Monticello plantation. Through his marriage to Martha Wayles in 1772 and inheritance from his father-in-law John Wayles, in 1773 Jefferson inherited two plantations and 135 more slaves. By 1776, Jefferson was one of the largest planters in Virginia. However, the value of his property (including land and slaves) was increasingly offset by his growing debts, which made it very difficult for him to free any of his slaves. According to the operant financial laws of the time, slaves were regarded as "property" and hence as financial assets.

In his writings on American grievances justifying the Revolution, he attacked the British for sponsoring human trafficking to the Thirteen Colonies. In 1778, with Jefferson's leadership, slave importation was banned in Virginia, one of the first jurisdictions worldwide to do so. Jefferson was a lifelong advocate of ending the Atlantic Slave Trade and as president led the effort to make it illegal, signing a law that passed Congress in 1807, shortly before Britain passed a similar law.

In 1779, as a practical solution, Jefferson supported gradual emancipation, training, and colonization of African-American slaves rather than immediate manumission, believing that releasing unprepared persons with no place to go and no means to support themselves would only bring them misfortune."

– above is per *Wikipedia*.

Per History, Jefferson had an anti-slavery passage in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence.

"What isn't widely known, however, is that Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, in an early version of the Declaration, drafted a 168-word passage that condemned slavery as one of the many evils foisted upon the colonies by the British crown. The passage was cut from the final wording.

## What the deleted passage said

In his initial draft, Jefferson blamed Britain's King George for his role in creating and perpetuating the transatlantic slave trade—which he describes, in so many words, as a crime against humanity.

"He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither."

Jefferson went on to call the institution of slavery “piratical warfare,” “execrable commerce” and an “assemblage of horrors.” He then criticized the crown for

“exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.”

Decades later, in his autobiography, Jefferson primarily blamed two Southern states for the clause’s removal, while acknowledging the North’s role as well.

"The clause...reprobating the enslaving the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in compliance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who on the contrary still wished to continue it. Our Northern brethren also I believe felt a little tender under these censures; for tho' their people have very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others."

Jefferson himself had a complicated relationship to the “peculiar institution.” Despite his philosophical abhorrence of slavery and his ongoing legislative efforts to abolish the practice, Jefferson over his lifetime enslaved more than 600 people—including his own children with his enslaved concubine Sally Hemings. On his death in 1826, Jefferson, long plagued with debt, chose not to free any of the human beings he claimed as property.

Indeed, removing Jefferson's condemnation of slavery would prove the most significant deletion from the Declaration of Independence. The founders' failure to directly address the question of slavery exposed the hollowness of the words “all men created equal.” Nonetheless, the underlying ideals of

freedom and equality expressed in the document have inspired generations of Americans to struggle to obtain their inalienable rights.

**BY YOHURU WILLIAMS**

According to [\(1776\) The Deleted Passage of the Declaration of Independence \(blackpast.org\)](#) here are those 168 deleted words from the final version of the American Declaration. “He” is a reference to King George of England.

“He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its 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. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.”

*The above is attached as a download to the report linked below.*

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