

Essay on major contributions of thomas jefferson

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



We all know Thomas Jefferson as one of the founding fathers of the United States of America. But there is more to the persona of this great politician, than being just an intellectually astute person who understood the nuances of ruling a country, as vast and as culturally different as the USA. He was a polymath and had expertise in fields such as science, philosophy and religion. Yes, he made one of the most eloquent speeches in the history, against the parliamentary governance and he did author the ' declaration of independence'. But these are not his only contributions. The declaration of independence is one of the many political novelties contributed by Jefferson. He was a prolific writer and his writings on separation of state and church, is one such example of his political vision.

So immense are his contributions to the American Revolution, that sometimes Jefferson's achievements as a president is overlooked. The purchase of the Louisiana territory, in the year 1803 from France, is one of Thomas Jefferson's priceless contributions to the independent state of America. This purchase doubled the size of the United States at that time, and is to date, considered by historians as an example of Jefferson's belligerent diplomacy. (Herring, 2008) A French nobleman, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, brokered the deal and the entire stretch of over 800, 000 square miles of territory was bought for \$15 million.

Seeing the lucrative opportunity Jefferson decided to act swiftly and without proper constitutional authority went ahead with sealing the deal. This received negative criticisms from many factions. For Instance, Chernow opined that Jefferson, the principal author of the declaration of independence, acted in a way which exceeded the executive powers vested

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on him by the constitution. (Chernow, 2004) Despite these criticisms, the land purchase was a very profitable deal to the country, and is one of the most important contributions by Thomas Jefferson to the United States of America.

The second most important contribution of Jefferson is his initiatives against slavery. He had been a lifelong proponent of anti-slavery measures. He once said,

“ You know that nobody wishes more ardently to see an abolition not only of the trade but of the condition of slavery: and certainly nobody will be more willing to encounter every sacrifice for that object.”

-Thomas Jefferson to Brissot de Warville, February 11, 1788

Even though in his time he could not abolish slavery altogether, Jefferson was very vociferous about his anti slavery views. He tabled a proposal for voluntary emancipation of slavery in Virginia in the year 1769. His bill was not passed during his tenure as the Virginia Governor, but it did pave way for future reforms. In 1778, he brought in a law prohibiting the import of African slaves in Virginia. Further during 1784, he tried to bring in a ban of slave trade in the North-West territories, given up by the English forces in the year 1783. His proposed ordinance was defeated in the congress just by one vote. In 1807, during his term as a president, he signed the bill prohibiting the country from indulging in Slave trade. His writings made clear that he believed slavery to be an evil, both to the slaves and their masters.

But there are many critics who believe that Jefferson did not actively work for slavery abolition, because he himself owned more than 200 slaves during his

life time. He did not free many of them except a few older men and the ones related with Sally Hemings, with whom Jefferson is believed to have had an intimate relationship. But, as some historians would point out, Jefferson was raised in a period where the entire economic machinery of the Virginia state was heavily dependent on slave trade. Jefferson inherited his father's agricultural land, which was tended to and cultivated by slaves, and in fact slavery made the world he knew. The profits made from the slavery based agriculture, was the basis of the livelihood of the Jefferson family, and there was also his lifelong debt problems weighing on his back. He was not able to free most of them, until his loans and debts were cleared. But he did treat his slaves with humanity and fairness, and also taught them various trades that they might pursue once they are freed. In short, it would be appropriate to say that, though Jefferson abhorred the slave practice, his well being depended on it.

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