

Thomas jefferson on slavery and race - notes on the state of virginia, 1782

[History](#)



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s on the Of Virginia, 1782. s on the of Virginia, 1782 was written by Thomas Jefferson. Slavery had started long before Jefferson was born in 1743. It had existed in Virginia for almost a century. Jefferson was brought up on a plantation with workers who worked as slaves. As an adult, he later owned over 200 slaves. Although Jefferson thought blacks were inferior to other races, he later conceded the slavery might have contributed to their inferiority. He advocated for the freedom of the slaves when he became the legislator in Virginia, but he failed (Peden). Later, Jefferson introduced a bill to prevent freed blacks slaves from staying in the state. As the president, he signed a bill outlawing the slave trade.

Though Jefferson knew the negatives of slavery, he continued having slaves who worked for him. He only freed seven of his slaves who were all members of the same family at Monticello (Peden). Jefferson feared for his survival economically and the safety of whites due to former slaves who had been subjected to the harsh working conditions by their former masters. Later as an older man, he advocated freeing and returning all slaves to Africa. Jefferson's life and words show moral contradictions.

The American Past

In 1834, Fanny Kemble an American actress married Pierce Butler, who owned hundreds of slaves who worked on his family's farm in coast Virginia. She lived there for nearly a year and came to the reality of slavery. She kept a journal while on the farm indicating the living and working conditions of the slaves. After her divorce, she published the journal stating what she learned from slave women who visited her. In her diary, she highlighted how women were overworked and how their working condition was. In one particular

time, she wrote how one woman had lost her family due to “ ill luck” due to abuse. They came to her in the belief that she would be of great help in airing their grievance as her husband does what she asked though he forbid her from bringing him complaints from the slaves (Kemble).

She stated how the women were not given time to childbearing, and they were supposed to resume their farm duties immediately after childbearing. They begged her to talk to her husband though they knew it was impossible. She states how almost every woman has lost their children due to heavy work and no care. The enslaved woman narrated their woes at ease as it has become their day to day lives, but they believed their suffering were all n their days work (Johnson).

The journal portrays the use of abuse, mistreatment causing bodily harm and forced labor. This abuse resulted in high mortality rate especially in children as they lacked care while their parents were in the field working.

Historical Themes Revealed and the Reason the Authors Wrote the Documents.

Some of the historical themes revealed by the writers are racism, gender roles, male chauvinism, and political behavior. Blacks were considered inferior race as portrayed by Thomas Jefferson and Fanny Kemble. Jefferson stated that he thought blacks were naturally inferior to other races particular time that he later conceded that the work services they offered might have had an impact on their inferior abilities. He also introduced a bill to bar free blacks from staying in the state. Fanny revealed how her husband termed blacks as an inferior race incapable of mental culture and moral improvement. Jefferson used his political status as the president and

influences to advocate for the release of the slaves bringing clear the theme of political behavior that is also of great importance in today's society.

Fanny Kemble stated how her husband forbade her from bringing any more complaints to him. The theme of male chauvinism comes clear as her husband treated her though slaves believed she had access to him as his wife.

Both the writers wrote the document to highlight the plight of the slaves as both advocated the end of slavery. Jefferson wrote the declaration of independence opposing the slave trade and later as the president signed a bill outlawing that trade. Fanny wrote the journal of her experience with the slaves. She advocated for their fair treatment that is portrayed by her willingness to convey their grievances to her husband.

Works Cited

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