

Declaration of Independence Draft

Taken from: Africans in America <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h33.html>

Background Information

Of all his writings, Thomas Jefferson's most famous and far-reaching was undoubtedly his draft of the Declaration of Independence.

Although the issue of slavery was widely debated -- both the chattel slavery of Africans in America and the civil slavery that fired patriot rhetoric -- it is conspicuously absent from the final version of the Declaration. Yet in his rough draft, Jefferson railed against King George III for creating and sustaining the slave trade, describing it as "a cruel war against human nature."

Although Jefferson's description of the slave trade was as much an indictment of the colonies as of Britain and the king, the issue that most distressed the patriots stemmed from Lord Dunmore's 1775 proclamation that offered freedom to slaves who joined the British cause: "...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 also obtruded them..."

When the document was presented to the Continental Congress on July 1, 1776, both northern and southern slaveholding delegates objected to its inclusion, and it was removed. The only remaining allusion to the original paragraph on slavery is the phrase "He has excited domestic Insurrections among us," included in a list of grievances against the king.

Document

Excerpt from original draft

He [George III] 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 and carrying them into slavery in another hemispere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither. 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 and sold,] he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce [determining to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold]: 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 had deprived them, by murdering the people upon 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.