

Jefferson's Message to Congress, 1806

Information taken from Library of Congress: Establishing a Federal Republic

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffed.html>

Background Information

Federal prohibition of foreign importation of slaves

In his "Sixth Annual Message to Congress" on December 2, 1806, President Jefferson, at the earliest moment allowed by the Constitution, called on Congress to abolish the importation of slaves from outside the United States. The United States Constitution had forbidden Congress to abolish "the Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit" prior to 1808. Congress readily complied with the president's request and the importation of slaves was prohibited as of January 1, 1808.

Document

Excerpt from Jefferson's 6th Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 2, 1806

I congratulate you, fellow-citizens, on the approach of the period at which you may interpose your authority constitutionally, to withdraw the citizens of the United States from all further participation in those violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa, and which the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country, have long been eager to proscribe. Although no law you may pass can take prohibitory effect till the first day of the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, yet the intervening period is not too long to prevent, by timely notice, expeditions which cannot be completed before that day.